Disparity in precarity: Measuring insecurity and inequality in youth transitions from education into and within the labour market

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Pod'akovanie

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Abstract

Young people have always been argued to be disadvantaged in labour market opportunities and avoiding insecurity. Yet most of these arguments have been based on theoretical, anecdotal, and qualitative accounts, and they focus on aggregate measures of youth unemployment, which tend to hide inequality. The purpose of this thesis is to provide missing nationally representative empirical evidence on the extent of and inequality in insecurity in the contemporary English youth labour market, and in comparison to the past. After reviewing the existing literature (Chapter 1), the first analysis (Chapter 2), using data from the 1985 and 2015 Labour Force Survey, shows that there is a lot more nuance to the blanket claims of most types of insecurity increasing over time for most workers. The following two chapters (Chapters 3 and 4) investigate, using the longitudinal data from the Next Steps dataset, the mechanisms through which young people find themselves in insecure forms of employment for two groups: early-leavers from education, including those experiencing spells in NEET, and further-education graduates. My findings show that it is previous experiences of insecurity, and underlying structural factors, such as one's socio-economic position, sex, and caring responsibilities, rather than the non-participation in education, employment, or training, that puts young people in insecure jobs later in their labour market transitions. A major policy implication of these findings is that pushing young people into employment without considering its security, both in terms of career progression and stability, might potentially make youth transitions more chaotic and less advantageous. Furthermore, my findings put recent

government strategies of shifting responsibility onto young people and away from the state, and increasingly conditional welfare support, into question, because they fail to address the structural inequalities in access to, and returns from, education for young people in different socio-economic positions.

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Glossary of Abbreviations

FTE – Full Time Education
HE – Higher Education
IMD – Index of Multiple Deprivation
JSA – Jobseeker's Allowance
LFS – Labour Force Survey
LMO – Labour Market Outcomes
NEET – Not in Education, Employment, or Training
NS-SEC – National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification
NVQ – National Vocational Qualification
PAM – Partitioning Around Medoids
SOC – Standard Occupational Class
SEP – Socio-Economic Position
t-SNE – t-distributed stochastic neighbourhood embedding

Figures and Tables

Introduction

Work is a fundamental feature of people's individual and social identities. It locates people within the social stratification system, and it provides meaning, status, and income (Kalleberg, 2009). Having a decent and reliable income and a valued occupational status extends beyond its financial reward by being an important marker of a person's success, both intra- and inter-personally. In addition, work strengthens young people's participation in broader society (Dagdeviren et al, 2016; Eriksen, 2016) and has been argued to prevent many forms of criminal and deviant activity. Consequently, the success in transition from education into the labour market is predictive of wider improved life outcomes in the future (Faas et al, 2012). This success refers to not only positive labour market outputs but also outcomes. While positive outputs reflect simply successfully acquiring a job after entering the labour market, positive outcomes reflect the type of jobs and, particularly, the degree to which they promote personal security or insecurity (Epstein and McFarlan, 2011).

In this thesis an insecure job means employment that satisfies at least one of the following conditions: (1) it carries a threat of being arbitrarily terminated at short notice; (2) it does not provide sufficient protection in the event of unemployment or from in-work poverty; and (3) it does not provide opportunity for professional growth and career progression. This is important as higher levels of insecurity are associated, for example, with young people staying in parental homes for longer and postponing having their own families (Wolbers, 2007; Eriksen, 2016), which is particularly true for women (Modena and

Sabatini, 2012). They are also associated with lower job satisfaction (Warr, 1987; Nolan et al, 2000; Wichert, 2002; Campbell et al, 2007); worsened health and well-being (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010); and decline in political and social engagement (Standing, 2014).

Young people have always been argued to hold the short end of the stick when it comes to labour market opportunities and avoiding insecurity, particularly in times of widespread economic hardship and in more neo-liberal countries (Standing, 2011). Based on this argument, young people's disadvantage within the labour market would not appear to be anything new. However, this is not the impression from the recent academic and media coverage of this issue, which treat it as a novel phenomenon resulting from contemporary changes within the global labour market (such as reports published by employers' organisations the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC, 2008) and the Confederation of British Industry (CBI, 2008)). Despite the presence of insecurity not being new, one line of arguments proposes that youth disadvantage has indeed increased and the way in which insecurity is constructed and experienced has changed. This is claimed to be due to global changes in the market economy and national changes in welfare governance, particularly in countries with lower social support, like the UK. This has been achieved through a push towards punishing welfare strategies in the UK, which force young people into insecure employment or into education or training at the risk of being followed by low-security jobs. This approach is based on the premise that increasing one's employability through higher educational qualifications is a uniform solution to youth unemployment and

thus even forced participation should provide favourable labour market outcomes for young people. There is, however, very little empirical evidence to support this assumption. Furthermore, since the financial recession of the late 1980s, change no longer means progress (Eriksen, 2016). It is thus no surprise that concerns about young people's positions within the labour market have grown as the labour force participation rate in the UK has reached an all-time low in recent years (OECD, 2019). Whereas previously the slightly higher levels of out-of-work young people were a desirable occurrence from the perspective of the interests of capital, by forming a reserve army of labour (Marx and Engels, 2002) and thus strengthening the negotiating position of employers, the realities of recent years have started to pose problems for both the state and the capitalist labour market (Ainley, 2013). Increasing youth unemployment incurs not only financial and social costs to the state, it also has the potential to weaken the accumulation of capital by shrinking the talent pool as well as destabilising the meritocratic discourses on opportunity, equality, and social mobility (Simmons et al, 2013). Furthermore, it is not just the issue of unemployment that is claimed to be threatening young people's positions in the labour market, but also the nature of the employment they are likely to acquire in the early stages of their transitions into the labour market from full-time education, such as into temporary and part-time employment (Furlong et al, 2011; Standing, 2014; OECD, 2016).

This alleged deterioration in workers' positions has been argued to be due to several important changes in the labour market and the pace at which these

changes have occurred, especially since the transition to post-Fordism in the West. Long-term planning and commitment from both employers and employees has mostly turned into short-term business strategies (Eriksen, 2016). The intensification of globalisation and advancements in technology, backed up by neo-liberal deregulation, promised flexibility - in a sense of personal freedom and control over work - but delivered, for many, insecurity and reduced autonomy instead (Eriksen, 2016). In this vein, workers have been presented with the idealised 'enterprise discourse' (du Gay, 1996; du Gay and Salaman, 1992) celebrating flexibility as freedom through emancipation. However, this seems to have resulted in a rather one-sided flexibility further benefiting employers – by providing a disposable labour army; and governments – by shifting responsibility from the state to individuals to justify cutting welfare provisions (Vallas and Hill, 2012; Vallas and Prener, 2012). While countries with social-democratic governments were able to mitigate these changes for their core workers in more precarious forms of employment, in neo-liberal countries these protections were stripped away further. It is thus of great interest to examine the impact of these changes on workers in developed Western countries with limited safety nets.

In short, the changes in the global labour market in the last few decades introduced or deepened the levels of insecurity for various groups of workers. This has been particularly enabled by the shift in the responsibility for employment from the collective to the individual. This means that the emphasis is on increasing workers' 'employability' rather than filling in the gaps between labour demand and supply. In other words, the increased risks

and insecurities are seen to be a result of people's individual lacks rather than as socially embedded inequalities (Thompson, 2011). The role of the government has thus become that of forcing people into education, training, or employment by decreasing the 'incentive' to be out of work and increasing their employability, rather than addressing any structural barriers to employment (Ball, 2007; Maguire, 2010; Farthing, 2015). This has been done mainly by increasing participation in education or training as the solution to the problem of youth unemployment, inequality, and social mobility (EU, 2011).

However, most of the arguments around the contemporary state of insecurity within the youth labour market have been based on theoretical, anecdotal, and qualitative accounts. This is not to argue that there have not been changes in the experiences of insecurity in the youth labour market, but rather that the ability to generalise this notion as a new norm and a widespread phenomenon has not yet been substantiated by appropriate empirical evidence. While this missing evidence has not gone unnoticed in the academic literature, it remains absent (see Harrison, 1994; Lash and Urry, 1987; Pfeffer and Baron, 1988; Rubin, 1995, 1996; Smith, 2010). Currently, the most comprehensive account of the changing experiences of insecurity in the labour market is that by Standing (2012), but his work too is 'handicapped by an almost complete absence of data' (Ross, 2015: 102). There have been several high-quality case studies exploring changing patterns of insecurity within the labour market (see Krasas-Rogers, 1995; Henson, 1996; Smith, 2001; Barley and Kunda, 2004; Padavic, 2005), but these studies lack the

ability to provide a general trend of these changes on a structural level (Vallas and Prener, 2012). Furthermore, the very policies aimed at improving young people's transitions from education into the labour market have not been challenged on their effectiveness other than through aggregate measures of youth unemployment, which tend to hide the inequality inherent in the experiences of insecurity within these transitions. Focusing only on the dichotomy between employment and unemployment might thus mask and even divert attention from the real problem of the experiences of insecurity in the labour market (Furlong, 2006). Equally, considering only job tenure could conceal the real extent of insecurity among those who are staying in jobs *because* they feel insecure (de Ruyter and Burgess, 2003). Taking this one step further, understanding the inequalities in these experiences of insecurity is, according to Wilkinson and Pickett (2010), integral in benefitting not only the most disadvantaged groups but to our society as a whole and everyone within it. By examining employment inequalities it is also possible to challenge the blanket claims of e*veryone* being insecure, a claim which avoids determining the changes and scale of insecurity, as well as any factors rooted in existing structural inequalities (Ross, 2015).

There are therefore a number of questions that still need answers grounded in empirical evidence in order to establish a clear picture of the changing nature and the extent of insecurity in the youth labour market, as well as the effectiveness of contemporary government policies in trying to mitigate this insecurity. The purpose of this thesis is to provide such evidence to a number of outstanding questions within the literature by focusing on the experiences

of insecurity in transitions of young people from education into and within the labour market. I do so through three complementary analyses that, taken together, provide nationally representative empirical evidence on the extent of insecurity in the contemporary English youth labour market in comparison to thirty years ago and the mediating role of education in reducing this insecurity.

Before presenting the context, methodology, and findings of each of the three analyses, Chapter 1 provides a discussion of some of the most notable changes that shaped the contemporary labour market, in order to provide both background to the thesis, and a comprehensive review of the literature. Although this discussion does not provide an exhaustive account of every event that could influence individual and group experiences in the youth labour market, the purpose of the chapter is to compare such experiences on a national level in England. I start off by introducing the notion of insecurity and changes within the labour market in the last thirty years. I then move on to discussing the three major changes to the contemporary labour market that have been argued to have shaped the experiences of insecurity: (1) transferral of risks from employers onto employees; (2) diminishing welfare and union protection; and (3) increasingly widespread demands of the new knowledge economy. This discussion is followed by outlining the impacts of such changes specifically on the youth labour market, and also providing an account of the changes in gender dynamics within the labour market that have contributed to shaping the experiences of contemporary forms of insecurity. I conclude this chapter by identifying the areas of missing research within the sphere of youth transitions from education into and within the labour market,

such as a narrow focus on income and tenure, and subjective measures of insecurity. I then present an account of how I aim to address these gaps with my novel research analyses.

The following three chapters (Chapter 2 to 4) provide standalone pieces of research, each addressing a series of research questions that together offer empirical evidence to many of the unsubstantiated claims in the academic literature and media coverage. Chapter 2 deals with a major gap in the academic literature on this topic by presenting empirical evidence identifying the changes in the extent and types of insecurity in the contemporary youth labour market in comparison with historical levels. It has indeed been the greatest criticism of many works on increasing precarity in all spheres of the labour market that they lack empirical evidence to support their claims (Harrison, 1994; Lash and Urry, 1987; Pfeffer and Baron, 1988; Rubin, 1995, 1996; Smith, 2010; Vallas and Prener, 2012). I provide such evidence by comparing the prevalence of insecurity in the labour market between 1985 and 2015 using data from the Labour Force Survey. More specifically, in this chapter I set out to test the rhetoric about the increasing levels of precarity in the youth labour market over the last thirty years, and to quantitatively establish the magnitude of the changes of four types of labour market insecurity: income, work, employment, and skill reproduction insecurity. This analysis provides an understanding of (1) the ways in which young people might be more disadvantaged in the labour market compared to other age groups, (2) whether they have become more disadvantaged over time, and (3) whether they have become disproportionately more disadvantaged over time

than other age groups. My main finding is that there have indeed been changes in the experiences of precarity in the youth labour market but due to the distinctiveness of these changes for the different age groups it is not possible to claim in absolute terms that precarity has increased. The findings of my analysis support this premise in that the relationship between time period, age, and changing levels of insecurity is indeed not as simple and generalizable as the academic literature to date makes it out to be. In some respects, such as the likelihood of working full time, all age groups are worse off in their levels of income security. However, in other respects, such as non-standard employment contracts, young people do in fact fare worse than they did thirty years ago, both in absolute terms, and when compared to other age groups. Furthermore, with respect to closing the gender gap, men are falling closer to women's levels of insecurity rather than women catching up to men's. Nevertheless, there have also been some improvements for all age groups, particularly with regards to working conditions and well-being.

The following two chapters (Chapters 3 and 4) investigate the mechanisms through which young people find themselves in insecure forms of employment, both during their entries into, and in the early stages of, their participation in the labour market. These complementary chapters focus on two different sections of the youth population: those who left full-time education within three years past the compulsory age of 16, and further-education graduates. Examining the underlying differences within these two groups which affect their labour market outcomes provides a greater understanding of whether it is in fact the individual responsibility of young

people, or rather wider structural factors, that explains young people's propensity to end up in more insecure employment. Through these findings it is possible to evaluate the credibility of the fundamental principles on which contemporary government policies are based, and which try to tackle youth unemployment and increase their successful transitions into and within the labour market.

Chapter 3 takes a longitudinal approach, which is needed when examining dynamic notions, such as transitions from education into employment, by studying whether and how young people's insecurity changes as they move into and within the labour market. Its particular focus is on those who leave full-time education early and are faced with either not being in education, employment, or training (NEET) or taking up insecure forms of employment. This is due to contemporary government policies being focused on young people staying out of NEET with the ultimate goal of forcing them to enter the labour market without appropriate evidencial base to back them up. I analyse the effects of experiencing any spells in NEET, including the number and duration of those spells, and experiences of insecure forms of employment, on the probability of remaining in insecure employment later on in their transitions, rather than moving into more stable careers. This is to understand whether the government's efforts to keep young people out of NEET are effective or possibly instead a tool for warehousing them to simply keep them out of the youth unemployment statistics. The purpose of this analysis is to provide the missing evidence behind the dominant assumption of any employment being preferable to spells in NEET, on which the contemporary

workfare policies are based, beyond simply monitoring the levels of youth unemployment and job tenure. My findings suggest that, in terms of security in the labour market later in young people's transitions, experiences of NEET have a negligible effect compared to earlier experiences of insecure employment. A major policy implication of these findings is that pushing young people into employment without considering its security, both in terms of career progression and stability, might potentially make youth transitions more chaotic and less advantageous. Nevertheless, the strongest predictors of insecure employment remain structural factors, primarily sex and caring responsibilities. These findings suggest that individual employability alone cannot account for the different probabilities of young people moving into and out of insecure employment. This in turn puts into question the government strategy of shifting responsibility onto young people and away from the state, and setting welfare support as conditional upon participation in employment.

Chapter 4 involves an assessment of the returns from education, and particularly from degree-level education, on the probability of being in insecure employment at the age of 25. It does so by (1) unpicking the relationship between education and insecurity in the entries into and transitions within the labour market; (2) challenging the notion of personal responsibility over one's labour market outcomes by considering the effects of structural factors in the analysis; (3) putting into question the idea of higher education being a uniform solution for all young people in escaping precarity; and (4) providing missing empirical evidence to confront the current view of individual responsibility, on which the government's policies for tackling youth

unemployment and welfare provision are based. The analysis is split into two steps. Firstly, typologies of young people are established by identifying five distinct socio-economic positions (SEPs) based on young people's familial and individual backgrounds. Secondly, the impact of education on each of these groups' labour market insecurity is measured. My findings reveal that education is no longer a safe way to protect oneself from insecurity in the labour market as it does not provide a universal solution to young people in all socio-economic positions. I found no evidence to support the notion of education as an apparatus of the perpetuation of socio-economic inequalities working in favour of the dominant SEPs (Furlong, 2009). However, the results did show that, for the lowest SEPs, even when engaging in certain forms of further education, they could not catch up to their high-SEP counterparts who did not hold a degree. This would suggest that while lower SEPs have worse chances of progression into the 'right' forms of higher education in the first place, even if they succeed, education is not the golden route to meritocracy.

I conclude my thesis with a summary of the main findings and a discussion of how my three anayses together provide a comprehensive account of the changing experiences of insecurity by young people in their transitions from education into and within the labour market. I also discuss the role of education in mitigating insecurity in the contemporary youth labour market, as well as the effects of government policies of increased participation, and recommendations for considerations towards future policies. Lastly, I provide a discussion of the limitation of this thesis and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 1: Insecurity, precarity, and changes in the youth labour market: a review of the literature

1.1 Introduction

In order to be able to analyse the transitions of young people from education into the labour market, it is essential to understand the current and historical contexts within which these transitions operate. The labour market has changed drastically over the last few decades and, in the process, introduced or deepened the levels of insecurity for various groups of workers. From my review of the literature on these changes, I develop the framework for my analyses. I first discuss the major changes in the global and national labour markets that have been argued to have brought about heightened levels of employment insecurity. I then provide an account of how these changes have, respectively, been mitigated or inflated by the differing policies of social-democratic and neo-liberal governments. Thirdly, I point out how the supply side of the labour market has reshaped youth transitions through arguments based on a shift from industrial manufacturing to the post-industrial knowledge economy. I then move on to unpick how these changes in the labour market have been argued to particularly affect young people who generally start their labour market participation in positions of disadvantage, and I also discuss how this situation differs for young men and young women. Lastly, I review the existing research on the prevalence and inequality in experiences of precarity, particularly with regards to the youth labour market.

In doing so, I identify a lack of robust empirical evidence to support much of the literature to date, and I go on to provide a clearer and more detailed picture of the changing insecurity of young people in their transitions from education into and within the labour market.

While the notion of insecurity in the labour market has been defined in different ways in the academic literature over time, I consider the most comprehensive theoretical account of the multi-dimensional nature of insecurity to be that set out by Standing (1986; 1999; 2002; 2011). Standing's definition is characterized by experiencing seven forms of labour-related insecurity, which apply at different levels to individuals depending on their vulnerability. The seven forms of insecurity are described as follows:

1. *'Labour market insecurity* refers to the lack of adequate employment. This means that, at the macro-level, there is a deficiency of suitable employment opportunities for every member of society. It is not just the shortage of available jobs versus the number of job seekers, but also the inadequacy of such jobs relative to the job seekers' skills and abilities.
2. *Employment insecurity* is the lack of appropriate regulations on employers. More specifically, it refers to the limited protections for employees against arbitrary hiring and firing.
3. *Job insecurity* represents the existence of certain barriers that prevent one from retaining niche skills and abilities. This in turn limits the opportunities for upward mobility.

4. *Work insecurity* embodies the absence of suitable health and safety laws and regulations, as well as rules around humane treatment of employees, both in terms of working conditions and working hours.
5. *Skill reproduction insecurity* denotes non-existence of apposite opportunities for one to gain and hone their skills through the use of employment schemes/trainings, apprenticeships, and networking.
6. *Income insecurity* suggests the scarcity of an adequate income. This includes, firstly, not being financially rewarded according to the skills needed to perform the tasks required of the job, as well as relative deprivation compared to others. Secondly, it is not being provided with an income sufficient at least to cater for basic human needs, whether one is currently in or out of employment. Thirdly, it includes the lack of proper mechanisms to reduce income inequality within the respective society and, fourthly, uncertainty about the stability of such income.
7. *Representation insecurity* indicates the absence of a collective voice capable of fairly representing people's needs and precarious experiences in the labour market.' (Holcekova, 2015: 3-4)

According to Standing, the level at which someone experiences any of these seven forms of insecurity will determine the degree to which they belong to the precariat. In this thesis, I will define insecurity as having experienced at least one of these seven forms of insecurity.

1.2 Transferral of risks from employers onto employees

The most influential factors behind the undercutting of the positions of workers within the labour market and their ensuing insecurity are the intensification of globalisation and the subsequent response to it by governments with different political agendas (Purcell and Purcell, 1999; de Ruyter and Burgess, 2003). The phenomenon of globalisation brought about an expansion of the spatial dimensions of trade and movement of the labour market by transferring a substantial portion of production from the local and the national to the global scale (Peck, 1996). Globalisation was made possible primarily due to technological advances that allowed greater connectivity, and political changes that allowed freedom of movement (e.g. of goods, information, capital, and the labour force). This in turn allowed employers to widen their search and relocate (portions of) their business to places with cheaper and less regulated sources of labour (Kalleberg, 2009). In the UK and Western Europe, the inclusion of former Soviet Bloc countries in the global economy further increased the labour market supply (Freeman, 2007). However, despite the world becoming more integrated than ever, 'rights, duties, opportunities and constraints continue to be unevenly distributed' (Eriksen, 2016: 471). Outsourcing to other countries with cheaper labour costs, and reduced regulation and workers' rights, thus became more cost-efficient than employing 'from within' (de Ruyter and Burgess, 2003). In short, globalisation has brought about increased competition for labour from migrant workers as well as relocation of parts of or whole businesses to countries with lower wages and labour protections.

As such, globalisation has further taken power from employees and put it into the hands of capital (Kalleberg, 2009; Vallas and Prener, 2012; Bidwell et al, 2013). Such a shift in power was additionally supported through the casualisation of employment relationships. Gaining greater flexibility in hiring and firing practices has diminished employers' interest in long-term commitments to their workers, particularly in more neo-liberal countries such as the UK (Breen, 1997). Job terminations have ceased to be tied to business cycles and have instead become a common strategy to increase short-term profits (Kalleberg, 2009). This 'recommodification of risks' not only resulted in weakeninig the bargaining power of the labour supply but also in a 'precarity trap' (Breen, 1997; Barbieri, 2009; Standing, 2011) for those workers stuck in jobs with short fixed-term contracts and high turnover rates (Barbieri, 2009; OECD, 2006). Firms have increasingly adopted a new model of reserving secure jobs for certain groups of employees while transferring risks onto new and less-qualified workers through the use of non-standard employment contracts (Barbieri, 2009). The traditional model, where employee loyalty is exchanged for employment security, has broken down without a sufficient alternative job security model taking its place (Vallas and Prener, 2012).

It has been argued that the intensification of corporate power through shifting of risk from employers to employees has also increased the polarisation of job positions through the decline in middle-class jobs and the increase in high-wage and low-wage occupations in the Western economies (Kalleberg, 2009). This polarisation is claimed to have started when the idea of division of labour was put into widespread use, eventually dividing workers into high-skilled and

low-skilled, with very little in-between (Barbieri, 2009). Thus, based on the level of skills one is judged to possess by their employer, one finds oneself in a role with either a high or a low level of income and security (Maurin and Postel-Vinay, 2005; DiPrete et al, 2006). This argument about 'flexibilisation at the margins' of the labour market is based on the idea that firms take on the risk from the professional class of employees, by providing them with well-paid and secure jobs, and transfer risk onto the outsourced, subcontracted and low-skilled proportion of their workforce, which forces these employees into precarious positions. Firms have also utilised improvements in technology to automate increasingly more low-skilled tasks (Barbieri, 2009). However, a number of commentators argue that neither group, nor anything in the middle, is now protected from precariousness – and this applies globally – which appears to be one of the most prominent changes in the experiences of precariousness in the contemporary labour market (Sennett, 1998; Kalleberg, 2009; Standing, 2014). This phenomenon was deepened by the most recent recession (in 2008), which resulted in increased unemployment, particularly among workers on already insecure contracts (Standing, 2014).

1.3 Diminishing welfare and union protection

The transferral of risks might not have happened to such a great extent were it not for the deregulation of the labour market and breakdown of government welfare and union support. This is especially notable in neo-liberal nations, in contrast to social-democratic countries such as those in Scandinavia, which were not affected to the same degree due to their more

supportive political economies (Gregory, 2000; Lapido and Wilkinson, 2002; de Ruyter and Burgess, 2003). As Barbieri puts it, 'institutions matter' and therefore they can make the difference between situations in which flexible jobs serve as transit stations for the primary labour market and situations where these new inequalities add on to the 'old' inequality structure leading to additional instability and social exclusion (2009: 5). With the slowdown in the growth of productivity in the 1980s, and intellectual arguments supporting the decision, the UK government chose to focus on the supply-side labour market policies (Blanchard, 2005), which resulted in worsening employment protection that continues to the current day (Furlong and Kelly, 2005; OECD, 2005; Furlong, 2006; Inui, 2009; Shildrick et al, 2012). This meant that the emphasis was on increasing workers' employability, rather than filling in the gaps between labour demand and supply. These policies were further expanded alongside the austerity measures following the 2008 financial crisis, which underpinned welfare reform in the UK that made welfare more punitive and conditional, purportedly to encourage more people into work.

Hence, it is no surprise that these cuts occurred simultaneously with what Beck (1992) calls the move from 'first' into 'second' modernity. This is the process of detraditionalisation and structural fragmentation of people's positions within contemporary society. It involves a shift from the collective 'right' to the question of what is right for every individual: the breakdown of the collective society by emphasizing the role of the individual (Beck, 1992). Consequently, increased risks and insecurities started to be seen as a result of people's individual lacks rather than as socially embedded inequalities

(Thompson, 2011). These lacks include having the 'right' education or skills, or even having the right attitude to find employment. The role of the government has consequently become viewed more as a medium for forcing people without work into jobs by decreasing the incentive to be out of work and increasing their employability, rather than addressing any structural barriers to employment (Ball, 2007; Maguire, 2010; Farthing, 2015).

The move away from a collective policy associated with industrialism to an individualised agenda associated with post-industrialism echoes two key assumptions about youth social policy in the post-war UK. Firstly, it is the denial of the existence of the traditional social classes without acknowledging the emergence of a new or, at least, existing social stratification system, which is based less on collectiveness and is instead reproduced in a more individualised way (Savage, 2000). This is partly a result of the disappearance of strong ideologies around the power structures within the labour market (such as Marxism), forming an 'ideological vacuum' within which there is no general consensus on the new forms of inequalities based on precariousness in the labour market (Piore, 2008). In addition, there has been a substantial decline in class-bound politics due to the fragmentation of the working class. Another assumption is the ideology of meritocracy, which wipes out a liability to correct the existing systemic inequalities, and often results in creating scape-goats and security fears of 'outsiders' (Brodie, 2007) in order to deflect attention from deeper structural problems (Garland, 2001). Such ignorance of the wider structural inequality entrenched in the labour market introduces new forms of insecurity to people's lives by failing to provide support for the more

disadvantaged end of the inequality spectrum (Tomaszewski and Cebulla, 2014) and blaming individuals for their situation.

International comparison supports the existence of a direct effect on the growing inequality and precariousness in the labour market of the shift in government policies and public perception of the labour force from collective to individual responsibility. Barbieri (2009), for example, argues that some European countries, such as the UK, are more tolerant of wage inequalities than others, which is reflected in their welfare system. There has been a complete or near complete disappearance of trade unions, Wage Councils, and the Fair Wages Resolution. The policies developed in the last thirty years have been focused on the supply-side of the labour market and have largely ignored the deficiencies in the appropriate quantity and quality of the current demand for labour (Shildrick et al, 2012). Tunstall et al (2012), for instance, found that in an economic trough, it takes someone out of work in the general working-age population twice as many job applications to obtain the same number of interviews as would be the case at an economic peak. This is made worse by the increased flexibility on the employers' part, which can be attributed to the diminishing presence of labour unions, reduced governmental support and protection of workers through shrinking welfare provision, and increased privatisation (Furlong and Kelly, 2005; Kalleberg, 2009; Shildrick et al, 2012). Furthermore, due to both the ideological shift towards individualism, and government legislation negatively affecting the ability of trade unions to run and organise, there has been a decline in union presence in workplaces and union memberships among employees (Brown et al, 1997; Burgess and

Macdonald, 1998; Machin, 2000; de Ruyter and Burgess, 2003). Employees are thus no longer protected to the same extent as thirty years ago against the profit-making strategies adopted in the organisation of the contemporary economic market.

It is thus important to highlight that the developments in policies and welfare institutions in the last few decades have greatly contributed to the consequences of labour market globalisation and flexibilisation (Barbieri, 2009). Specifically, it is the difference in how different governments have dealt with the global changes that turns insecurity into either a transitional situation or a new (or additional) form of inequality (Barbieri, 2009). The policies of conditional welfare implemented by the UK Conservative government, in particular, despite the cushioning effects of the EU in the form of workers protection, had been argued to have the effect of increasing insecurity on the supply side of the labour market (Heery and Abbott, 2000; Robinson, 2000; de Ruyter and Burgess, 2003; Dagdeviren et al, 2016).

1.4 The knowledge economy

One way in which the government has been legitimising the policy of participation in education, training, or employment in the recent decades is through claiming to address the needs of the current labour market, which have very little base in evidence. The most common rhetoric is the notion of the increasingly widespread knowledge-based economy, which requires higher levels of education and continuous training in order to improve one's

chances of securing and sustaining employment and to maintain the competitiveness of national economies (Cabinet Office, 2008; Kalleberg, 2009; Standing, 2014). The reason for the aim to increase participation in education is said to be the skills shortage among young people, which results in a skill mismatch between labour supply and demand that can only be addressed by participation in further education or training (Cabinet Office, 2008). Consequently, efforts have been made to focus primarily on increasing participation in education as the solution to the problem of youth unemployment, as well as inequality and social mobility (EU, 2011). However, it is uncertain how much this is effective given the increasing extent of youth *under*employment in the recent years (Standing, 2011; Shildrick et al, 2012) and the low priority of formal qualifications claimed by employers (Lawy et al, 2010). Nevertheless, academic researchers and government departments have supported the strategy of increasing the uptake of higher educational qualifications. For instance, Bratti et al (2008) found a substantial wage premium for university graduates as opposed to those without higher education, whose consistency - despite increased supply of graduates in the recent decade (Walker and Zhu, 2008) - suggests a healthy demand for them (The Browne Review, 2010). It has also been asserted that high educational attainment is associated with higher employment rates as well as more positive career outcomes and higher occupational status (Flouri and Hawkes, 2008; Faas et al, 2012). However, this might also be due to other factors such as the socio-economic position of young people and their parents, rather than education alone. Based on thin research evidence such as this, much of the government's work has been focused on keeping young people in education,

employment, or training. For instance, one of the main goals of the Social Exclusion Unit was to work with young people between the ages of 13 and 19 who were not in education, training, or employment (NEET). The aim was to re-integrate them into society through their participation in education, particularly degree-level education, or the labour market. These assumptions have however not been based on empirical evidence, which is aimed to be addressed by my research.

Although the idea of increasing levels of education and training that lies behind these approaches is relatively sound, there are several problems that continue to be overlooked. Firstly, the attempt to intensify young people's participation has been in parallel with public sector cuts, the privatisation of education, growing youth unemployment, and the removal of the Educational Maintenance Allowance (Snee and Devine, 2014). These declines in the government's direct involvement in young people's participation go hand in hand with insufficient availability of good-quality post-compulsory education, especially vocational training programmes, and the small number of available apprenticeships (Braconier, 2012). With the frequent changes to those (non-university) qualifications, such as BTEC or NVQs, acquired by young people, it is difficult for employers to keep up to date with these changes and assess the value of new qualifications. As a result, employers often deem these to be of low or even no value (Machin and Vignoles, 2006; Wolf, 2011). Secondly, even if the government schemes do manage to provide young people with training qualifications of any value, qualitative studies suggest that more often than not there is no successive higher-level training or employment

opportunity available upon the completion of the programme (Lawy et al, 2010; Maguire, 2010). In a few cases, such as the study by Simmons et al (2013), young people had to repeatedly undertake training with the same providers, with a few having to repeatedly complete the same training programme in order to comply with the conditional welfare system. Machin and Vignoles (2006) also argue that some of the most recently provided vocational trainings (e.g. NVQ2) offer little to no improvement to young people's employability. It is thus no surprise that some young people deliberately avoided engagement with support services such as Connexions, whose aim was to push young people out of NEET (Simmons et al, 2013). More worryingly, it is usually the lower end of the socio-economic spectrum that tends to be affected the most as the emphasis is given on the 'placement rate' of young people in training rather than the development of skills that would increase their chances of secure employment (Ogborn, 1986; Standing, 1990). It would appear that young people need to gain the 'right' skills and access the 'right' education or training in order to achieve higher returns in the labour market, but these are often exclusive to those with more resources (OECD, 2007; Russell et al, 2010; Braconier, 2012).

In addition, some argue that even the current increasingly knowledge-based economy cannot utilise the growing numbers of highly skilled young people in the labour force due to insufficient demand for such labour (Allen and Ainley, 2010; Keep, 2012). In a broader sense, education has become a 'positional good' that loses value with increasing uptake among young people, while at the same time imposing greater penalties for those who do not obtain it

(Saunders, 1996). The proportion of jobs said to require no qualification decreased since the mid 1980s yet the insecurity is claimed to have increased (de Ruyter and Burgess, 2003). As Galbraith puts it, 'training and even education are no substitute … for ensuring that good jobs at decent wages are actually available when needed' (2008: 156).

Based on the above arguments it can be seen that education is no longer a secure way to protect oneself from a precarious position within the labour market, thus raising questions about the effectiveness of the increased uptake of young people in further education (Vallas and Cummins, 2015). Coercion into training or apprenticeships, with no employment opportunity at the end, along with the increasing conditionality of the welfare system, tends to act as a barrier to employment rather than an opening (Simmons et al, 2013).

1.5 Youth labour market conditions

Young people have always been vulnerable, particularly upon their entry into and in the early stages of employment, and especially in times of widespread economic hardship, due to their inexperience and brevity of time spent in the labour market. This makes them more prone to insecure contracts and dismissal than prime-age employees (Bell and Blanchflower, 2011; Elsby et al, 2011; Flek and Mysíková, 2016). With the substantial changes to the labour market outlined earlier, it is no surprise that a lot of attention has recently been given to the idea of increasingly precarious experiences of young people within the labour market (Utas, 2005; Walther,

2006; Furlong and Cartmel, 2007; Shildrick and MacDonald, 2007; Langevang, 2008; Jeffrey, 2010; Sommers, 2012; Nico, 2013; Hadjivassiliou et al, 2015; Hardgrove et al, 2015; Flek and Mysíková, 2016). Farrugia (2012) goes so far as to argue that we have experienced a collapse of the youth labour market, especially for the working-class. Young people have long been the most likely age group to face the risk of becoming or staying unemployed, especially during times of recession (Standing, 2011). However, the concerns about this issue have become more pressing with the continuously upward trend in youth unemployment since the 1960s, with spikes along the way, and reaching all-time high levels in recent years (OECD, 2016) after the 2008 financial crisis and the following austerity measures (Tomaszewski and Cebulla, 2014). The aforementioned changes in policies hit young people particularly hard due to their already disadvantaged position within the labour market, and lesser welfare provision.

Furthermore, it is not just the issue of unemployment that is threatening young people's positions in the labour market, but also the nature of the employment they are likely to acquire. Whereas previously, young people were claimed to begin employment in a precarious state but gradually move away from it by establishing a steady career route, a substantial volume of contemporary academic writing on the changing UK labour market portrays current entry-level jobs as rarely a stepping-stone into a steady employment (Fryer, 2002; Furlong and Cartmel, 2006; Shildrick et al, 2012; Hardgrove et al, 2015; Pultz and Hviid, 2016). This is due to the initial stages of a traditional career path, which require lower levels of qualifications and experience, being transformed

from a temporary position into a long-term career due to the enhanced flexibility for employers and greater insecurity for the workers (Standing, 1986; Brückner and Mayer, 2004; Fullerton and Wallace, 2007; Kalleberg, 2011). In other words, the jobs traditionally taken up by young people as entry-level jobs as a part of their route into stable employment are argued to now offer little to no opportunities for progression within them (Heinz, 2004; Côté and Bynner, 2008; Koen et al, 2012; Aronson et al, 2015), which is especially true for highly deregulated labour markets such as the UK (Wolbers, 2007). For instance, Hadjivassiliou et al (2015) argued that almost 50% of young workers on temporary contracts would prefer a permanent position but are not able to find one. It would therefore seem that today's young people are faced with not only high levels of unemployment but also a shortage of adequate opportunities to find a stable and reliable source of income.

In addition, this suggested disappearance of entry-level jobs and the rise in the compulsory school-leaving age also made way for higher education to be the new 'career' among many young people today (Roberts, 2013; Snee and Devine, 2014). However, with the increased costs of participation in further education, young people are being punished not only by the lack of employment opportunities but also by entering the labour market with the accumulation of a vast debt and no guarantee of receiving adequate labour market returns. This is primarily because education is no longer considered a secure way to protect oneself from a precarious position within the labour market, as employers often do not use educational signals in ways economic theory and government policies had predicted (Rosenbaum and Kariya, 1991;

Miller and Rosenbaum, 1996, 1997; Bills, 2003; Vallas and Cummins, 2015). For some young people, prolonged educational trajectories are merely an alternative to employment rather than a tool to build themselves up for labour market participation. Nevertheless once these young people exit full-time education they are set directly against those with no formal qualification but greater work experience in competition for entry-level positions.

The aforementioned idea of personal responsibility can be supported by the change in policy treating participation as crucial in shaping young people into 'ideal' subjects through the discourse on modern citizenship (Bessant, 2004; Brooks, 2012a). According to Strathdee (2013), drawing on the work of Habermas (1976), current approaches to addressing young people's participation can be categorised into three groups: motivational, bridging, and punishing strategies. Motivational strategies aim to encourage young people to make better life choices and thus develop the necessary skills and attitudes to secure employment after leaving (preferably extended periods in) education. Examples of such policy are Studio Schools that simulate working life (Brooks, 2012a) or Positive for Youth, which hopes to inspire young people to be the active agents in improving their life chances (Cabinet Office and DfE, 2012) as well as countless employability courses. The idea is to engage young people in post-compulsory education that would further develop their employability and a greater array of skills needed to enter and remain in the so-called knowledge economy (Simmons and Thompson, 2011). Bridging strategies on the other hand try to engage not only young people but also prospective employers in order to create direct contact between them,

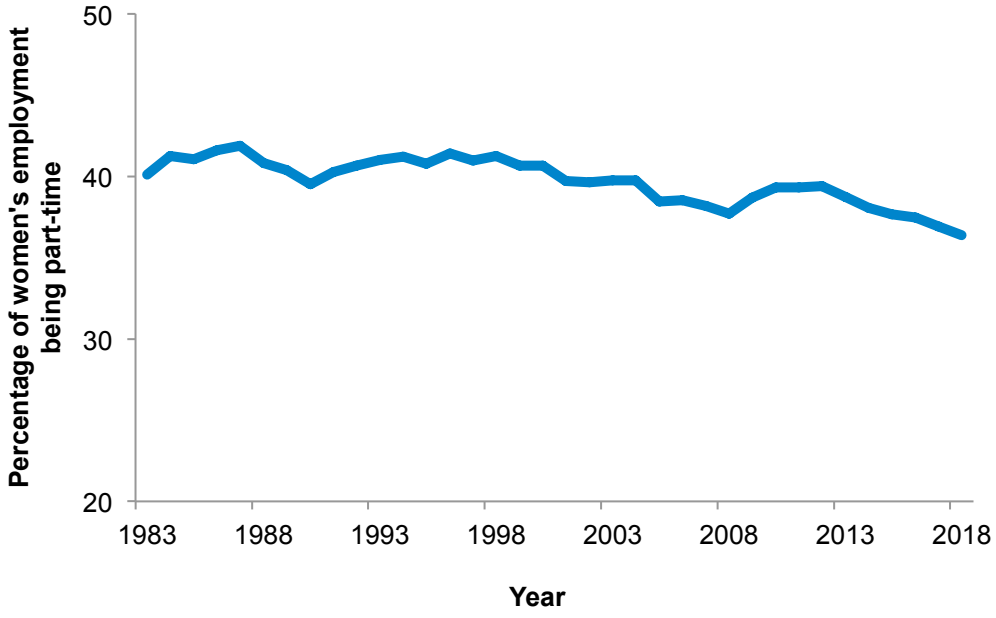
thus forming networks and opportunities for lasting employment (Strathdee, 2013). This goal has been on the agenda for some time in form of various agencies such as Connexions or the Youth Support Service (Lawy et al, 2010) and by increasing the availability of apprenticeship schemes (Department for Innovation Universities and Skills, 2007). Lastly, the punishing approach intends to force young people into continuing their education or training by either making it a direct requirement or by penalising those who do not comply. One way this has been achieved is by raising the compulsory education participation age to 18, thus requiring young people to either stay in full-time education, start an apprenticeship or a traineeship, or work or volunteer while participating in part-time education or training (Education and Skills Act, 2008). Another way is the rising use of the benefit system as conditional upon participation in education, training, or apprenticeship (Simmons and Thompson, 2013). The assumption behind these strategies is that compulsory education provides both the specialised and transferable skills needed to compete in the increasingly scarce youth labour market (OECD, 2008; Brown et al, 2010; Roberts, 2011). This reliance on education has even reached as far as scrutinising and ranking educational institutions based on the students' labour market outcomes upon leaving (Holdsworth and Brewis, 2014). It is therefore crucial in this discourse that the qualifications offered to (or even demanded of) young people have a high potential of helping to find secure employment upon their completion. Yet, as the hitherto discussion suggests, education is no golden bullet to secure employment.

1.6 Cracks in the glass ceiling

The final major shift discussed here that has changed the labour market into what it is now is the attempt to move towards gender equality. Women went from being mostly excluded from the formal labour market into occupying its margins as they faced the glass ceiling, preventing them from progressing past certain lower-level positions in the job hierarchy (Purcell, 2000). In terms of the law governing their participation, a lot has changed, especially since the introduction of the Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination Acts in the 1970s and their amendments in the 1980s to require women to earn the same pay as men for equal work. Additionally, with equal rights being given to part-time workers and the introduction of statutory paternity leave in addition to maternity leave, the labour market appears to have opened up more for women and welcomed their greater participation. The government also submitted to pressure from women's groups to have mostly equal rights, however, it neglected the role of the demand for labour as it changed its welfare strategies (MacLeavy, 2011; Brooks, 2012b). As a result, the demand for female employees has been argued to stay primarily within the sphere of flexible, fixed-term, casual, or part-time jobs (de Ruyter and Burgess, 2003). This can be seen in Figure 1 below which shows the percentage of all employment among women that is formed by part-time work yearly between 1983 and 2018 (OECD, 2019). The proportion of the female workforce in part-time work has decreased by only 2 percentage points over the last thirty years.

Figure 1

The percentage of employment consisting of part-time employment among women between 1983 and 2018 in England



One line of argument trying to explain this occurrence is the idea of a successful labour market entrant being a competitive, daring individual; traits usually associated with masculinity (Abbott et al, 2006; Ringrose, 2007; Whyte, 2017). Hence, more feminine traits, such as support and collaboration, and how they determine associated educational and employment routes, tend to be given less value and thus lower reward in the labour market (Smyth, 2005; Brooks, 2012a; Baker et al, 2016). For instance, when choosing extra-curricular activities, women are shown to be more likely to be involved in community-oriented activities, whereas men tend to participate in sports clubs (Purcell et al, 2009). Gender differences are thus among the factors that shape fields of study, and in doing so restrict women's labour market opportunities (Iannelli and Smyth, 2008). This would explain why despite

women in general having higher levels of formal education than men, they tend to be worse off when it comes to labour market outcomes, such as income, job status, and working hours, despite often requiring more expertise in their jobs to compensate for structural inequalities in hiring processes (Russell et al, 2010; Elias and Purcell, 2013; Aronson et al, 2015).

In addition, the widespread reliance of today's households on dual incomes in order to survive, and the punishing strategies of the welfare system, mean that women are more likely to have to take up more insecure forms of work and, in doing so, become stuck in the cycle of moving in and out of precarity (Furlong et al, 2011). However, this problem appears to be lost in the current debate, which is predominantly about precariousness spreading to all workers (Standing, 2011). This is despite the fact that, with recent extensive austerity measures, women's security is threatened to a greater extent than men's, as they tend to be more reliant on welfare provision. In addition, their jobs are often insecure in nature, whether due to insufficient financial security or contracts carrying the threat of termination (Purcell, 2000; MacLeavy, 2011; Brooks, 2012b).

The increased participation of women in the labour market, though still primarily at the margins, is also discussed as the reason for the increasing precarity among men (Shildrick et al, 2012; OECD, 2016). Men's continued roles as bread-winners could force them to accept extensive insecurity in the labour market over unemployment (Hanushek et al, 2017). Nevertheless, it is questionable whether this is yet another shift from social to personal

responsibility for one's labour market position. Comparison of social-democratic governments, such as those in Scandinavia, and more neo-liberal governments, like the UK, would instead suggest that it is the result of a deficit of good quality jobs, and inappropriate protection of workers. This would thus support the argument that it is inadequate demand for labour, rather than the supply of it, which appears to have failed to integrate the increased participation of women in the labour market. This is particularly true for young women who face a sort of double insecurity brought on by the disadvantageous position of being both young people and women in the labour market.

1.7 Importance of new research

So far, my discussion has focused primarily on theoretical academic notions of the changes to the contemporary labour market. However, many of these claims have only little empirical evidence to support them. This is not to say that the aforementioned changes did not result in increasingly precarious transitions of young people from education into the labour market in Western societies, but rather that the strength and detail of such arguments is lacking without appropriate empirical evidence – something that has not gone unnoticed (see Harrison, 1994; Lash and Urry, 1987; Pfeffer and Baron, 1988; Rubin, 1995, 1996; Smith, 2010). In order to test these arguments on a national level, especially with regards to the effects of age (Hogan and Astone, 1986), quantitative analysis of representative data needs to be carried out (Nico, 2013). However, the major shortcoming of hitherto presented

quantitative measures of young people's position within the labour market is the use of average or aggregate measures, such as the commonly used unemployment rates, which tend to hide the dynamic nature of insecurity as well as the extent and types of insecurity in the youth labour market (de Ruyter and Burgess, 2003).

The most comprehensive account of the changing experiences of insecurity in the labour market has been provided by Standing (2012). However, as I have already remarked, his work too is 'handicapped by an almost complete absence of data' (Ross, 2015: 102). There have been several high-quality case studies exploring changing patterns of insecurity within the labour market (see Krasas-Rogers, 1995; Henson, 1996; Smith, 2001; Barley and Kunda, 2004; Padavic, 2005), but these studies lack the ability to provide a general trend of these changes on a structural level (Vallas and Prener, 2012).

It is thus of great importance to dissect these claims and establish the extent to which work, as an important source of identity, purpose, social integration, and income, is becoming increasingly precarious for young people. By investigating these changes in the forms and extent of precarity, it is also possible to challenge current misconceptions about a vast array of social inequalities based on gender, race, social-economic position, insecurities present in the labour market, work-life balance, and dynamics of (im)migration politics (Kalleberg, 2009). Wilkinson and Pickett (2010) believe that understanding the mechanisms of such inequalities would benefit not only the

most disadvantaged groups but would actually improve the state of our society as a whole and everyone within it in terms of numerous outcomes by decreasing inequality, which has been shown to increase all manner of social problems from ill health to murder rates. Furthermore, there has been a growing concern about job loss among workers as the price of job loss has increased while the security of holding down a job has decreased (Kalleberg, 2009). The reasons go back to the aforementioned shifting of responsibility from the state to individuals and the market principles increasingly infiltrating political and social life (Taylor-Gooby, 2012; Brooks, 2012a). The negative consequences of job loss and insecurity in the labour market include financial struggles and often poverty, breakdown of a crucial part of one's identity, physical and mental health problems, and reduced opportunities for future employment or career progression (Sennett, 1998; Furlong et al, 2011; Koen et al, 2012). Furthermore, young people who are not participating in employment, education, or training are often said to be more prone to anti-social or even criminal behaviours, with the response from government being primarily through punitive policing and control strategies rather than addressing the underlying structural inequalities (see Garland, 2001; Rodger, 2008). This may become particularly salient among young people, who are often not considered a priority during a labour market demand shortage, but whose career trajectories depend heavily on success in their initial years in the labour market (Aronson et al, 2015).

Despite the hitherto discussed accounts of the changes shaping the types and extent of insecurity in the youth labour market provide a solid understanding

of the challenges faced by young people in the contemporary labour market, it leaves us without the evidence to support it. I have reviewed extensive literature on the subject, crucial empirical evidence from representative population studies is missing. It is therefore the purpose of this thesis to provide this missing evidence, but also to delve deeper into what shapes the inequality in these experiences of insecurity in the youth labour market. As discussed in the thesis introduction, I do so through three pieces of analysis, each addressing a particular lack in the research literature to date. The next chapter identifies the changes in the extent of insecurity in the contemporary youth labour market in comparison with historical levels.

Chapter 2: Historical comparison of experiences of insecurity in youth transitions between 1985 and 2015

2.1 Introduction

It has become a strong theme in academia to claim that there has been a growth in the levels of precarity that are said to be increasingly infiltrating every part of the labour market (de Ruyter and Burgess, 2003; Ecclestone, 2007; Roberts, 2011; Furlong et al, 2011; Standing, 2014; Pultz and Hviid, 2016). Vallas and Prener (2012) go as far as to argue that downsizing and outsourcing labour threatens all tiers of workers, including highly-skilled professionals. This has been particularly true since the 1980s, when employment protections began decreasing and insecure work increasing in many advanced industrialised countries (Furlong and Kelly, 2005; OECD, 2005; Furlong, 2006; Inui, 2009; Shildrick et al, 2012). As I outlined in Chapter 1, these changes were mainly brought about by globalisation, different political economies, and the decline of certain labour market sectors such as manufacturing. This has not only eradicated many low- and mid-level jobs, but also blocked traditional routes of career progression by reducing the number of intermediate and high-level jobs (Hadjivassiliou et al, 2015). While the existence of precarity in the labour market is hardly a new notion, various scholars argue that it is the way in which precarity is experienced that has changed over the last thirty years (de Ruyter and Burgess, 2003; Standing, 2011; Eriksen, 2016).

While in the past, insecurity was primarily associated with experiences or threats of unemployment, particularly long-term unemployment and thus financial insecurity, workers in the contemporary labour market are argued to face a wider array of insecurities (Standing, 2011). Long-term unemployment has indeed been declining, but it is argued that those who would previously have experienced long-term unemployment are now finding themselves in insecure jobs (Peck and Theodore, 2000; de Ruyter and Burgess, 2003).

It has also been suggested that the impact of precarity weighs heaviest on young people because they face much bigger problems in the contemporary labour market than those faced by older age groups, as well as by earlier generations of young people (Standing, 2011). From a labour force supply perspective, they face increasing levels of competition for low- and mid-level jobs from more experienced workers, who have been forced to move laterally in their employment progressions (Hadjivassiliou et al, 2015). From the demand perspective, the proportion of jobs requiring no qualifications, which have historically been taken up mainly by young entrants into the labour market, has been decreasing since the mid-1980s (de Ruyter and Burgess, 2003). While certain forms of flexibility have been welcomed and praised by young people for promising to provide autonomy and control, the reality for most is instead the negative consequences of more flexible labour markets, such as increased levels of financial insecurity and uncertainty over job tenure (Eriksen, 2016).

Nevertheless, the aforementioned rhetoric about the increasingly insecure positions of young people in the labour market has been frequently treated as a given fact even though little evidence has been presented for this claim. Indeed, the greatest criticism of the work in this area is that it lacks empirical evidence (Harrison, 1994; Lash and Urry, 1987; Pfeffer and Baron, 1988; Rubin, 1995, 1996; Smith, 2010; Vallas and Prener, 2012). While there have been several high-quality qualitative studies delving into the changing experiences of insecurity in the labour market (see Roberts, 2011; Shildrick et al, 2012; Dagdeviren et al, 2016), a more general overview of these changes is missing (Vallas and Prener, 2012). It is unclear whether young people in the contemporary labour market are experiencing more or different forms of insecurity than previously, or whether new forms of insecurity are being added on top of the existing ones. Ross (2015) goes as far as to suggest that the blanket claims of *everyone* being insecure enabled the avoidance of having to determine the actual proportion of people who experience such heightened levels of insecurity and how this has changed over time. It is thus important to examine the ways in which the labour market has changed over the last few decades and how these changes have affected young people's experiences of insecurity.

In this chapter, I set out firstly to test the rhetoric of increasing levels of precarity in the youth labour market over the last thirty years, and secondly to quantitatively establish the magnitude of the changes of four types of labour market insecurity: income insecurity, work insecurity, employment insecurity, and skill reproduction insecurity. I do so by measuring the proportion of young

people with favourable labour market outcomes in 1985 and 2015, and testing whether there are any statistically significant differences between them.

A favourable labour market outcome comprises not only of the young person being employed, but also the type, security, and progression in the secured employment (Epstein and McFarlan, 2011). This includes aspects of employment such as the type of employment contract, availability of on-the-job training and career progression, and wages and other benefits, that all have a substantial influence on future prospects (Culliney, 2014). My main finding is that there have indeed been changes in the experiences of precarity in the youth labour market but, due to the distinctiveness of these changes, it is not possible to claim in absolute terms that precarity has increased. Therefore, instead of focusing on whether the youth transitions have indeed become more de-standardised or not, I discuss the distinctiveness of precariousness for young people nowadays as opposed to thirty years ago. It is also crucial to study whether different groups of young people experience different levels and types of insecurity in order to highlight the importance of structural factors in shaping young people's transitions from education into the labour market and thus which groups are more likely to suffer insecurity than others. This will also be addressed in Chapters 3 and 4 that explore the impact of experiences of insecurity in early entries into the labour market, and the mitigating effects of staying in higher education, respectively, on different groups of young people based on their socio-economic position.

My analysis in this chapter shows that the relationships between time period, age, and changing levels of insecurity are not as simple and generalisable as the academic literature suggests. In some respects, such as the likelihood of working full time, all age groups are found to be worse off in terms of their levels of income security. However, in other respects, such as non-standard employment contracts, young people do in fact fare disproportionately worse than they did thirty years ago. Furthermore, with respect to closing the gender gap, men's overall levels of insecurity have now worsened to become closer to women's levels, rather than women catching up with men. Nevertheless, there have also been some improvements for all age groups, particularly with regards to working conditions and well-being.

2.1.1 Changing forms of insecurity

Thirty years ago, young people were claimed to enter the labour market in a precarious state but gradually move away from this by establishing a steady career route. However, much contemporary academic writing on the changing UK labour market portrays the current entry-level jobs as being long-term sources of precariousness themselves, and rarely as stepping-stones into steady employment (Shildrick et al, 2012; Hardgrove et al, 2015). In other words, the jobs traditionally taken up by young people as entry-level jobs, as a part of their route into steady employment, are now fragmented and increasingly nonstandard, with little to no opportunities for progression within them (Heinz, 2004; Côté and Bynner, 2008; Koen et al, 2012; Aronson et al, 2015), which is especially true in highly deregulated labour markets such as the UK (Wolbers, 2007). This could explain why youth

transitions are claimed to be more chaotic now than in the past, with young people not only more insecure in terms of their contractual agreements but also lacking career pathways out of insecurity (Heinz, 2004; Côté and Bynner, 2008; Koen et al, 2012).

While securing employment used to be a remedy for precarity, this is no longer argued to be true. Despite the level of employment increasing during the economic recovery that followed the 2008 crisis, Sissons (2011) argues that this in fact represented a movement from unemployment to low-wage and insecure occupations. Monitoring only the levels of youth unemployment is thus a less accurate marker of the state of the youth labour market, as any increases in employment rates might actually reflect young people being forced into insecure or unattractive jobs with little to no career prospects (Peck and Theodore, 2000). Equally, the arguments for workfare policies that encourage people into employment have been based on the aggregate snapshots of unemployment rates declining over time, which ignore the insecure positions young people are forced to take (Peck and Theodore, 2000).

Focusing on the dichotomy between employment and unemployment thus conceals the real problem of young people's experiences of insecurity in the labour market (Furlong, 2006). For instance, in their qualitative study of workers' experiences of insecurity in the labour market, Dagdeviren et al (2016) observed that, due to the perceived or actual lack of adequate employment opportunities, people felt the need to take up and stay in

whatever jobs were available, even if that meant taking up and staying in precarious jobs. Equally, considering only job tenure conceals the real extent of insecurity among those who are staying in jobs *because* they feel insecure (de Ruyter and Burgess, 2003). The same applies for measuring income, whereby snapshots of young people's earnings at the start of their employment trajectories might hide the contractual conditions of such income. For instance, young people who earn more than their peers might in fact be in temporary forms of employment in which such income is not guaranteed in the long term, thus exposing them to income insecurity. Even if sufficient income is earned within the household at a particular point in time, Dagdeviren et al (2016) showed that, in addition to low income, insecurity and dependency are 'fundamental dimensions' of deprivation and hardship. In fact, insecurity not only gives rise to hardship but is now argued to be an integral part of it (Eriksen, 2016).

While flexible employment structures have sometimes been presented as an emancipatory change giving workers the chance to have more freedom within the labour market, for instance by working part time or opting out of the 48-hour week, they have been argued to have increased levels of insecurity instead (Vallas and Hill, 2012). This is primarily due to power shifting even more into the hands of the capital, as discussed in Chapter 1, giving more control over working hours to employers rather than workers, which has been argued to contribute to higher levels of insecurity (Green, 2000). It is thus not always a liberating choice for workers to work more or less than the standard 35-hour week, but rather it may be that the only alternative to unemployment

is such a position with more insecurity (Vallas and Prener, 2012). These traditional measures: employment levels, tenure, and income, are thus no longer sufficient for establishing the levels of insecurity in the youth labour market (de Ruyter and Burgess, 2003). For example, it has been claimed that the number of employees working longer than the standard 35-hour week has increased. In addition, some workers are even being forced to opt out of the maximum 48-hour week that has been introduced as an option for people to not be required to work overtime (de Ruyter and Burgess, 2003).

Despite these claims and concerns, it is unclear whether young people in the contemporary labour market are experiencing new forms of insecurity compared to those of thirty years ago and, if so, whether these are a substitution or an addition to the already existing forms of insecurity. As simple as these questions may sound, there appears to be very little empirical research into what these trends actually look like. There is no nationally representative historical comparison of the changing nature and levels of insecurity in the youth labour market. It is important to expand the definition of insecurity from simply the threat and experience of unemployment to various forms of financial insecurity, and to consider employees' power over their employment conditions (Shildrick et al, 2012). Moreover, due to the lack of empirical research on historical trends, it is unknown whether the perceived increase in precarity is due to the introduction of wider criteria of what it means to be insecure, or if there are indeed more people in these insecure positions. Applying contemporary definitions of precarity to historical data should help uncover how these experiences have changed.

2.1.2 Who is insecure?

One line of argument suggests that the expanding knowledge economy requires everyone to continually develop new skills and enhance their existing ones (Sennett, 1998; Kalleberg, 2009; Standing, 2014). Hence, it is no longer just young entrants who find themselves in the labour market without essential skills, but anyone at any stage of their career (if they have one). This endangers the notion of linear progression within the labour market (de Ruyter and Burgess, 2003; Simmons and Thompson, 2011). As Kalleberg (2009) maintains, this constant need for taking up new skills and honing existing ones is one of the most notable changes since the 1960s and one that has led to the increase and prevalent nature of insecurity in the labour force. Furthermore, Kalleberg (2009) posits that it is the widespread fear of job loss that has spread to all areas and levels of the labour market, rather than being specific just to low-skilled workers. Were Kalleberg's argument true, this would undermine the widely held view that it is young people who are particularly vulnerable to contemporary precarity.

On the contrary, Maguire (2010) believes that the flexibilisation and casualisation of the labour market has resulted in young people having to compete with older workers for what were traditionally entry-level jobs 'reserved' for them, thus making the young more vulnerable than before. Young people are argued to give out more signals of insecurity than other age groups, primarily due to lack of experience within the labour market, which potentially make them an expensive gamble in the hiring process. They are thus perceived by potential employers as a greater risk, and so more likely to

be marginalised (Flek and Mysíková, 2016). In turn, they might also be forced into jobs with lower pay and higher insecurity (Flek and Mysíková, 2016). There are in fact unequal experiences of precariousness in the labour market, with higher-skilled (and usually older) workers having a higher chance of exiting precarious positions than the lower-skilled and unskilled portion of the labour market (occupied mainly by young entrants) (Giesecke and Groß, 2003; Fouarge and Layte, 2005; Maurin and Postel-Vinay, 2005; DiPrete et al, 2006; Barbieri and Scherer, 2008). This is because young people occupy a unique space within the labour market whereby fragmented trajectories and experiences of the various forms of insecurity are tolerated as a 'rite of passage' into security. Equally, the punishing strategies of conditional benefits are argued to disproportionally affect young people who end up being forced into precarious forms of employment (Furlong et al, 2011). This is particularly true in the earlier stages of labour market entry, wherein young people are often forced to do 'work-for-labour' in order to gain the experience and build up the skills needed to obtain secure jobs (Standing, 2011). They often do this by participating in highly flexible jobs such as internships, short-term contracts, or even self-employment (Saint-Paul, 1996a, 1996b; Streeck, 2003; Blossfeld et al, 2005, 2008; Barbieri, 2009). The danger in these positions is higher labour turnover among those in insecure jobs, most likely taken up by young entrants, potentially trapping some of them in a cycle of precarity (OECD, 2006; Standing, 2014). It also threatens the very reason young people take up these jobs by under-investing in skills development and so wasting their productivity potential without building the skills required to obtain more secure occupations (Barbieri, 2009). Due to this lack of skill

enhancement and the weak bargaining power caused by their insecure employment positions, young people are less likely to exit these precarious positions than older, more skilled or experienced workers. Older workers tend to be in a more advantageous position to obtain permanent and more secure employment, while the contemporary young entrants tend to get trapped in precarity rather than finding their 'bridge' into security (Giesecke and Groß, 2003; Fouarge and Layte, 2005; Barbieri and Scherer, 2008; Barbieri, 2009).

Another important aspect of changes in experiences of precarity is related to gender. Traditionally, women were more likely to occupy jobs with lower levels of security, whether it be part-time work, work with lower pay due to lower-skilled positions, or dropping out of the labour market altogether (Standing, 2014). Even though this is still the case, and the proportion of women in part-time employment has stayed roughly the same since the 1980s, the proportion of men in part-time jobs has increased noticeably (OECD, 2016). It is important to not misinterpret this trend as an improvement for women. In order to understand the changing prevalence of insecurity, we have to consider it not only in relative but also absolute terms. Is the insecurity gap closing because women's positions are improving in the labour market or because men's are worsening? And what about those who find themselves out of a job? Since women tend to be more reliant on benefits and social protection than men, any cutbacks or stricter rules and conditions for claimants are more likely to deepen than to close the gender-inequality gap (MacLeavy, 2011; Brooks, 2012b). Yet, returning to the argument around staying in jobs because of insecurity, Hanushek et al (2017) posit that men

are more likely to enter and/or stay in precarious positions rather than enter unemployment or exit the labour market altogether, due to their persisting self-perception as bread-winners.

In summary, the changes in the global labour market in the last few decades have been argued to have had a substantial impact on the levels of insecurity among young people in contemporary Western societies. This is primarily due to young people being trapped in precarious jobs from their point of entry into the labour market, rather than experiencing it as a springboard into a stable career, caused by increased competition from older workers for the shrinking pool of secure jobs. However, these claims are often made based on assumptions supported by anecdotal or small-scale evidence rather than based on a nationally representative historical comparison of the changing nature and levels of insecurity among younger workers in comparison to other age groups.

2.2 Research approach

As I have suggested, Standing's definition of the precariat and labour market insecurity in general is very broad, and includes a wide range of subjective perceptions or even threats of insecurity. Conley's (2012) criticism of this definition is that most employees find themselves unhappy with their current job or their promotion prospects at some point during their participation in the labour market, which makes it impossible to estimate the size of the precariat from subjective measures. It would imply that at some

point in workers' labour market participation they will all inevitably find themselves experiencing one or more types of insecurity as defined by Standing. Such sweeping claims erase important differences in people's experiences of insecurity and dismiss the need for further research. Instead, I posit that better targeted, focused empirical research may provide insight into the nuance of differing experiences, rather than simply reporting universal dissatisfaction, particularly around the claim that levels of insecurity are higher than ever before. Numerous high-standard qualitative studies have been conducted revealing differences in the experiences of young people during their transitions from education into and within the labour market. For instance, Shildrick and her colleagues' (2012) research on working-class young people in precarious 'low-pay no-pay' cycles, and Roberts's (2011) study of the 'ordinary youth', both highlighted diversity among young people that policy makers tend to treat as homogenous. Despite this, there remains a lack of generalisable research evidence; either of this observed diversity, or even if we were to dismiss that diversity and accept the theory of homogeneous far-reaching precarity, of its magnitude and prevalence.

Various scholars have confirmed a greater 'churn' of young people in and out of the labour market compared to other age groups (for instance, Elsby et al, 2011; Flek and Mysíková, 2016), but this does not in itself confirm whether young entrants experience greater levels of insecurity now than in the past. Equally, it is important to not discuss insecurity as a single measure of comparable experiences between people in different occupational levels and types. Even if we could create such a measure, average measures of the

concept of insecurity could conceal the different forms of insecurity experienced in various segments of the labour market (de Ruyter and Burgess, 2003). Standing (2008) himself admits there is no perfect instrument for measuring insecurity, let alone to conduct a historical comparison; nevertheless, he makes numerous claims of increased precarity, and urges social researchers to pursue the quantification of it.

This chapter thus provides the missing and much-needed empirical evidence of such changes. In much of the debate, the data to support the idea of increased precarity is missing, and it is unclear what the reference category is that the contemporary young people are being compared to. Are young people worse off now than they used to be a number of decades ago, or are they worse off than other age groups in the current labour market? Or is it a combination of the two, whereby they are worse off in absolute terms over time *and* compared to other age groups during the same time periods? It is thus important to pick apart and examine the claim that young people are suffering more now than before: in what ways are they worse off, and are they indeed disproportionately more insecure than other age groups, or is it simply that the standards of employment have dropped for everyone equally?

My main focus is to provide evidence about, firstly, the ways in which young people might be more disadvantaged in the labour market compared to other age groups. Secondly, to show whether they have become more disadvantaged over time; and thirdly, whether young people have become disproportionately more disadvantaged than other age groups over time. I do

so by examining young people's positions in the labour market within and across two points, 1985 and 2015, both in comparison to the same age group, and to other age groups. Lastly, as outlined in the literature, these experiences are expected to vary between men and women, especially as they move through the labour market over time. This chapter will consequently analyse men and women separately. It provides an empirical comparison of the overall levels of insecurity among people of different age groups by testing the significance of any changes that might have occurred between 1985 and 2015 among nationally representative samples of the working population of England.

2.2.1 Sample

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) was chosen as the most appropriate and robust source of data for this analysis. This traditionally cross-sectional study dates back to the 1970s and is still running, which makes it suitable for historical and contemporary comparisons. The 2015 dataset was chosen as the most recent dataset available for all four quarters in the year at the time of my analysis. I decided to use the 1985 as a point of comparison with the 2015 sample due to the time elapsed since the early 1980s recession to mimic the recession in 2008. These two time points are of great importance as they represent the start and the end point of the 'faustian bargain' the UK government made (Standing, 2014). In the early 1980s, as a result of globalisation, discussed in Chapter 1, lower wages in developing countries started to impose pressure on UK labour force's standards of living considering the lowering of wages to match the foreign levels. The faustian

bargain meant the UK government making up the difference in the cost of wages to employers and wages received by employees through subsidies and tax credits. On employees side, the access to cheap credit served as a way to try and hold on to their living standards which have started to decline over time. This bargain was however unsutainable and resulted in a buildup of a huge deficit and eventually came to an end when the 2008 financial crisis hit (Standing, 2014). Comparing the levels of insecurity in 1985 and 2015 thus provides an insight into how the employment conditions have changed over the last thirty years at two points in time when different strategy needed to be adopted in order to recover from the recent financial crisis – at the start and at the end of the faustian bargain. Additionally, when mirroring the 2008 recovery time point, the 1985 data was chosen as the wave of comparison in this analysis based on the availability of relevant variables and sample sizes for both sexes.

The data collection for LFS has changed slightly over time, so additional steps needed to be taken to match the two samples in years 1985 and 2015. While in 1985, there was a single sample collected annually, in 2015 data collection happened once every quarter with part of the sample consisting of new participants and part forming a rolling longitudinal sample surveyed for five consecutive quarters. Therefore, in order to match the structure of the 1985 dataset, all unique respondents across the four quarters in 2015 were pooled into a single dataset. Due to part of the sample consisting of the rolling longitudinal sample in 2015 but not in 1985, I only kept the first observation for

each individual who took part in the longitudinal portion of the 2015 data collection.

While there is no way to identify and link the repeated observations of the same individuals who form the longitudinal portion of the 2015 sample, in the cross-sectionally structured LFS dataset, this process was done in the following way. In the first quarter (January to March) all observations were kept. In the following quarters (April to June, July to September, and October to December), I only kept the data referring to the respondents' first wave of data collection or where the current wave was the one in which participants first joined the study. While it is acknowledged that this might not have achieved the filtering out of all repeated observations, I believe this is the most accurate way to ensure that the study is purely cross-sectional in order to match the 1985 dataset. This method of combining the LFS quarterly data is preferable to using the Annual Population Survey (APS) for the aims of my analysis. While the methodology of combining the LFS into APS - an annual, rather than quarterly, dataset – is sufficient for providing estimates of various labour market outcomes at a national and local area level, its limitations are substantial enough to varrant preference for the combined quarterly LFS. The main limitation affecting this decision is the nature of how waves are combined in APS, whereby in each quarter, the APS keeps waves 1 and 5. While this approach avoids the inclusion of duplicate records per household, compared to mine, it provides less accurate data. This is due to attrition of respondents over the course of the 5 waves, which is solved by roll-forward imputation. Considering the detailed breakdown of the sample into narrow age

groups and the low instances of certain forms of insecurities, precision of the data is paramount to this analysis.

The focus of this analysis was to look at employment conditions across time. Unemployment statistics are widely available and therefore only those classified as employed and no longer in full-time education were included in order to focus on the changing experiences of insecurity among workers. Due to the different labour market conditions in different areas of the UK, only respondents living in England were considered in this analysis. Also, as respondents were asked about detailed aspects of their working lives, it was deemed unsuitable to include proxy responses as these might invalidate responses and thus bias the analysis. After filtering out the respondents based on all the aforementioned criteria, the sample sizes were 27,999 cases in 1985 and 34,388 cases in 2015. All reported differences between these two time periods were tested using chi-squared tests and were significant at $p<0.05$. All reported figures were weighted using the person weight, corresponding to the relevant data collection year, as suggested by the LFS Methodology documentation.

2.2.2 Variables and Definitions

Variable selection was almost exclusively dictated by which ones were available in both datasets. In order to conduct a valid comparison, it is essential to use only variables that are measuring the same concept. Unfortunately, this limited the types of insecurity it was possible to compare across time as the variables that could not be sufficiently matched between

the datasets, or occurred in only one dataset, had to be dropped. The remaining variables were each categorised into one of the seven forms of in security proposed by Standing (2011): labour market insecurity, employment insecurity, job insecurity, work insecurity, skill reproduction insecurity, income insecurity, and representation insecurity (discussed in Chapter 1). Such a categorisation is meant to provide a clear distinction between the differing aspects of people's experiences in the labour market, and thus offers a more detailed examination of the type and extent of changes in young people's positions within the labour markets in 1985 and 2015. Using the LFS, it was only possible to match variables reflecting four of the main dimensions of insecurity out of the seven proposed by Standing (2011): income insecurity, work insecurity, employment insecurity, and skill reproduction insecurity. These are explained in more detail in the Results and Discussion & Conclusion sections.

In addition to providing evidence for some widely circulated claims about the transitions of young people from education into the labour market, this research adopts a different perspective on the relationship between age and employment conditions. In the discussion of disadvantage in the labour market with relation to age, the research to date predominantly focuses on defining people by their birth date and so classifies young people as those between the ages of 16 to 24. However, I consider such a categorisation to be inappropriate when examining the changing transitions across time periods due to the differing contexts of age in 1985 and 2015.

In my analysis, the compulsory school leaving age increased by two years and the average number of years people spend in full-time education has also increased due to the widening (more than doubling) participation in tertiary education between 1985 and 2015 (OECD, 2016). Considering the role of gender in these transitions, the decision of women to not participate in full-time employment is more likely to be based on their position within the education-to-employment route rather than their age. Although these two go hand in hand, with the increased participation of women in both tertiary education and employment, motherhood tends to be delayed in terms of age but not necessarily in terms of the number of years they have been participating in the labour market post full-time education. Therefore, the analysis of youth transitions from education into the labour market should not be based on time elapsed since birth but rather the length of time young people have been in the labour market since leaving full-time education.

One limitation of cross-sectional studies is that it is often not possible to obtain accurate life histories of the sample members. Although the LFS does include some retrospective questions, they are limited to the timeframe of twelve months. While it is not possible to know accurately the length of time that participants have been in the labour force, as opposed to being unemployed or inactive, I used the number of years since leaving full-time education as the best approximation available. This was calculated as their current reported age minus the age at which they reported leaving full-time education. Nevertheless, the importance of redefining the way in which we classify age in youth transitions, particularly in historical comparisons, is demonstrated via

Tables 1 and 2. These show the percentages of people belonging to different age groups banded in five-year periods distributed across the computed length of time since they left full-time education (FTE). It is evident that there has been a substantial change in the distribution of the length of time since FTE for most age groups, which suggests there is more variability in the ages at which young people enter the labour market now as opposed to thirty years ago. Therefore, in my analysis, the length of time since leaving FTE was used to define new entrants (between 0 and 5 years) as opposed to other groups (6-10, 11-15, 16-20, 21-25, 26-30, 31-35, 36-40, 41-45, 46+).

Table 1

Cross-tabulation of the 1985 sample respondents' age and the number of years since they left full-time education

Age	Number of years since leaving full time education										
	0-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46+	Total
16-20	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
21-25	40.7%	59.3%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
26-30	8.6%	38.1%	53.3%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
31-35	0.5%	7.6%	28.9%	63%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
36-40	0%	0.4%	5.7%	21%	72.9%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
41-45	0%	0%	0.3%	4.7%	18.8%	76.2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
46-50	0%	0%	0%	0.3%	2.5%	16.1%	81.1%	0%	0%	0%	100%
51-55	0%	0%	0%	0%	0.3%	2.5%	13.3%	83.9%	0%	0%	100%
56-60	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0.2%	1.7%	9.3%	88.8%	0%	100%
61-65	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0.5%	0.7%	9.3%	89.5%	100%

Table 2

Cross-tabulation of the 2015 sample respondents' age and the number of years since they left full-time education

Age	Number of years since leaving full time education										
	0-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46+	Total
16-20	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
21-25	66.7%	33.3%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
26-30	20.5%	49.1%	30.4%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
31-35	1.7%	20.4%	47.9%	30%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
36-40	0.1%	1.7%	19.3%	47.6%	31.3%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
41-45	0.1%	0.2%	1%	16%	37.2%	45.4%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
46-50	0%	0.1%	0.2%	0.9%	9.9%	37.9%	51%	0%	0%	0%	100%
51-55	0.1%	0%	0%	0%	0.5%	9.2%	38.3%	51.9%	0%	0%	100%
56-60	0%	0%	0%	0.1%	0.1%	0.6%	9%	38%	52.2%	0%	100%
61-65	0%	0%	0%	0%	0.1%	0.1%	0.5%	10.2%	36.1%	53%	100%

2.3 Results

As mentioned in the previous section, the variables that were possible to reliably match between the two datasets can be categorised into four main topics out of the original seven proposed by Standing (2011): income insecurity, work insecurity, employment insecurity, and skill reproduction insecurity. The purpose of my analysis is to test the widely made claims about the increasing experiences of insecurity in the labour market by young people and, if they are true, to provide a clearer understanding of the extent and the types of insecurity that have increased over time. Each of the areas of potential increase of insecurity was analysed separately in order to detail these changes.

2.3.1 Income insecurity

It is common practice to study income insecurity by comparing household earnings - not only in the academic literature but also in the media (BBC, 2016). However, it is often uncertainty of earnings, not just the pay people receive, that puts people with sufficient average pay per annum into precarious positions. This uncertainty is measured in three ways in my analysis: (1) the discrepancy between contractual and usual working hours; (2) whether participants work the equivalent of part-time, full-time, or overtime working hours; and (3) whether they are employed on temporary or permanent contracts.

In both the 1985 and the 2015 LFS, respondents were asked whether they are employed part time or full time, but were also asked to report how many hours a week they usually work. It was thus possible to see any discrepancies between the contracted number of hours and the actual number of hours worked. This reflects two types of insecurity: firstly, for those who worked lower number of hours than they were employed to, it could reflect income insecurity if they were paid hourly rather than annually; and, secondly, for those working more than they were employed to, it could reflect work insecurity, particularly if they were paid annually rather than hourly without being compensated for overtime.

The number of hours people usually work was grouped into three categories: part time for those working less than 35 hours a week; full time for those working at least 35 hours a week but 48 at most; and overtime for those

working more than 48 hours a week. The reason why the overtime category was included is that, between 1985 and 2015, a limit was imposed on the maximum number of hours people can work (48 hours a week), although, with their consent, employees can waive this right. The more general question of overtime refers to work insecurity rather than income insecurity, so will be discussed later in the relevant section. The results of the cross-tabulation of contractual and usual part-time/full-time/overtime status is displayed in Tables 3 and 4 below.

Table 3

Cross-tabulation of contractual employment type and usual working hours in 1985

Actual working hours	Reported employment type	
	Part time	Full time
Part time (less than 35 hours)	97.1%	3.8%
Full time (35-48 hours)	2.7%	78.8%
Overtime (more than 48 hours)	0.2%	17.4%
Total	100%	100%

Note. N = 27,916. Pearson chi2(2) = 23368 Pr = p < 0.001

Table 4

Cross-tabulation of contractual employment type and usual working hours in 2015

Actual working hours	Reported employment type	
	Part time	Full time
Part time (less than 35 hours)	98.8%	9.9%
Full time (35-48 hours)	1.2%	80.6%
Overtime (more than 48 hours)	0%	9.5%
Total	100%	100%

Note. N = 33,873. Pearson chi2(2) = 23910 Pr = $p < 0.001$

The proportions of people who report their job as full time but who are classified as part time based on their actual working hours (less than 35 hours a week) has increased from 3.8% in 1985 to 9.9% in 2015, while the proportion of part-time workers working 35 hours or more has decreased by 1.5%. This increase in insecurity is further supported by the changes in reported variability of weekly hours. Between 1985 and 2015, the percentage of respondents who said their hours vary has increased from 34 to 40%. In addition, full-time employees are more likely to report variability in their hours than part-time employees in both time periods.

All these differences were tested using chi-squared tests and were significant at $p<0.001$. This could therefore suggest that full-time employees, especially those paid hourly, tend to be in a more precarious position in the contemporary labour market than in 1985. They are more likely to work less

than they are contracted to, which means they not only lose out on pay but potentially also on other 'pro rata' calculated benefits such as paid leave or sick pay. In addition, their working hours tend to vary more than those of part-time employees thus adding to their income insecurity. Therefore, even though *the percentage of people reporting to be working full time has not changed much over time* from the aforementioned discrepancies, we can see that *the contract type does not necessarily reflect the reality in which over 6% more full-time employees do not work full-time equivalent hours in 2015 than in 1985*. Hence, in addressing the second measurement of income insecurity, the derived indicator of the usual number of hours worked is used rather than the contractual ones.

Based on the reported weekly working hours, there has been an overall increase by around 6% in the proportion of part-time workers, especially amongst the early entrants (less than 10 years since leaving FTE) and those who left FTE more than 40 years ago. Macquire (2010) argues that this situation has led to increased competition for traditionally entry-level jobs between the young entrants and older workers, which weakened the position of the young entrants due to older workers' greater experience within the labour market but without an adequate financial compensation for such experience. However, my findings reveal that, although a greater percentage of young people tend to work part time now than they did in 1985, they were and still are the age group with the highest proportion of individuals in full-time work. Therefore, it is more likely that *everyone is worse off in the contemporary labour market in terms of the likelihood of working full time,*

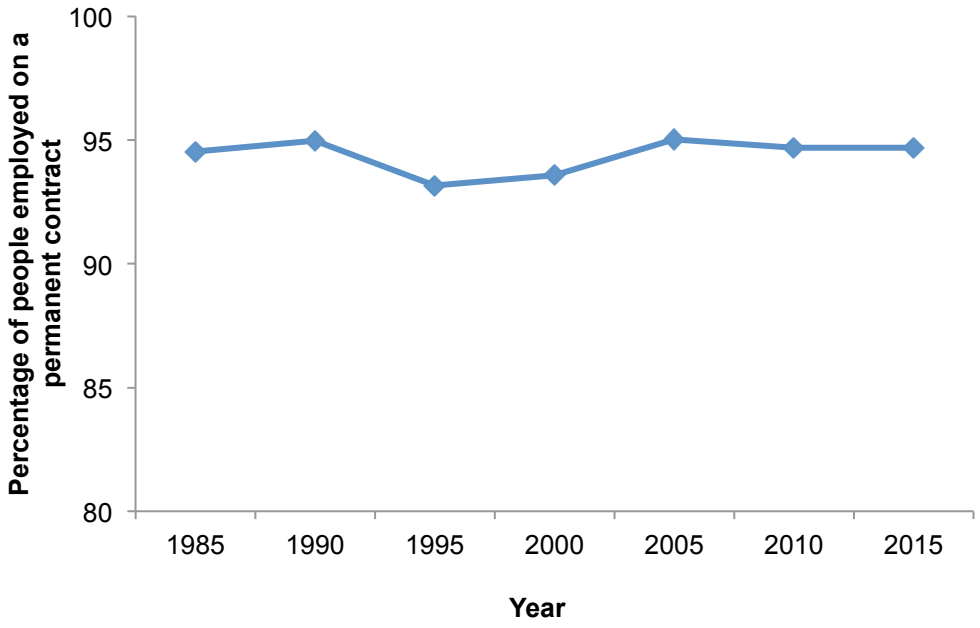
particularly older entrants, but not at a proportionate expense to young entrants.

Of course, just considering the usual number of hours people work does not necessarily reflect their differing levels of income insecurity. For instance, those usually working full time might enjoy higher pay and greater benefits. However, in order for them to really enjoy income security, they need to be relatively certain about their future as well as their current earnings. The main line of argument in relation to this has been the diminishing long-term commitment of employers to their employees (Breen, 1997). Moreover, it has been argued that such commitment has especially disappeared from the entry-level jobs traditionally taken up by young people, turning them into precarious temporary careers in themselves rather than stepping-stones into permanent employment (Shildrick et al, 2012; Hardgrove et al, 2015). In order to test these claims, a comparison was made between young entrants and other groups in 1985 and in 2015 as well as between young entrants across these time periods.

Examining all entrants, there is *no evidence to suggest that more people are employed on non-permanent contracts*. This is especially evident in the trend line shown in Figure 2, which shows very little movement in the proportion of people in permanent employment from 1985 to 2015.

Figure 2

The percentage of people employed on a permanent contract between 1985 and 2015 in England



Breaking it down by the length of time since FTE, there has been a very slight increase in non-permanent contracts among the early and late entrants, and a slight decrease among the middle section of respondents. Focusing on the young entrants, there has been a less than 3% increase in the number of people in non-permanent positions from 1985 to 2015. *While it is acknowledged that there has indeed been an increase in the percentage of young people with non-standard employment at the expense of the middle-length entrants, it is not to the alarming extent portrayed by the extensive academic debate.* If the casualisation and flexibilisation of the labour market were causing the initial stages of the traditional career path to be transformed from entry-level jobs into temporary positions (Standing, 1986; Brückner and Mayer, 2004; Fullerton and Wallace, 2007; Kalleberg, 2011), we would expect

to see young entrants being in much less favourable positions than they are. However, evidence to support this could not be found here. Rather, young people experience very comparable levels of risk now as they did thirty years ago due to their perceived riskiness as new entrants into the labour market without having yet accumulated experience.

Despite the claims that insecurity has permeated all sections of the labour market, some argue that it is particularly the male employees who are losing out through the increasing participation of women in the labour force (Shildrick et al, 2012). Exploring the changes in part-time versus full-time working hours from 1985 and 2015 for male and female young entrants, as summarised in Tables 5 and 6, we can see that this is not the case.

Table 5

Distribution of male young entrants (up to 5 years since leaving full-time education) working part time, full time, and overtime in 1985 and 2015

Working hours	Year	
	1985	2015
Part time (less than 35 hours)	6.8%	18.1%
Full time (35-48 hours)	73.2%	75%
Overtime (more than 48 hours)	20%	6.9%
Total	100%	100%

Note. N = 2,369. Pearson chi2(2) = 135 Pr = $p < 0.001$

Table 6

Distribution of female young entrants (up to 5 years since leaving full-time education) working part time, full time, and overtime in 1985 and 2015

Working hours	Year	
	1985	2015
Part time (less than 35 hours)	15.1%	30.6%
Full time (35-48 hours)	75.7%	67.2%
Overtime (more than 48 hours)	9.2%	2.2%
Total	100%	100%

Note. N = 2,369. Pearson chi2(2) = 135 Pr = p < 0.001

It is apparent that *everyone* fares less well in the labour market now than they did thirty years ago. In terms of the proportion of part-time employees, the increase is slightly higer among women (15.5%) than men (11.3%) in their first five years since leaving full-time education. However, we can also see that full-time employment among men has actually increased slightly, whereas there has been a fall among women of 8.5%. These opposing changes for men and women are primarily the result of a substantial drop in young men working more than 48 hours a week, which occurred simultaneously with the greatly diminishing manual labour jobs traditionally occupied by men and requiring long working hours, and a rise in part-time service sector jobs.

Concerning job permanency, the changes over time, and the differences between male and female young entrants in both within and across the time periods are negligible in magnitude, with around 90% of young entrants

holding permanent positions across both years and sexes. Therefore, *although it might seem that young men were the losers in gender equality movements, my findings indicate that in fact it might be the nature of the job contracts being offered to both men and women that makes everyone, not just men, experience increased income insecurity*. As de Ruyter and Burgess (2003) point out, the demand for female employees stayed primarily within the sphere of part-time, non-permanent jobs. It would thus seem that the gender gap has indeed been closing mainly by men entering less secure jobs rather than much improvement in women's positions.

2.3.2 Work insecurity

Work insecurity refers to failing to maintain the safety and well-being of employees in various ways, including regulating working time and unsociable hours. As mentioned in the previous section, a law was introduced between 1985 and 2015 to set the maximum number of working hours to 48, although employees can now opt out of this. In theory, employers cannot force their employees into working more than 48 hours a week without their consent. I say 'in theory' because such decisions are not always voluntary. Employers are not legally allowed to fire those who refuse, but people might be opting out as doing otherwise could affect their position within the firm or discourage future employers from hiring them.

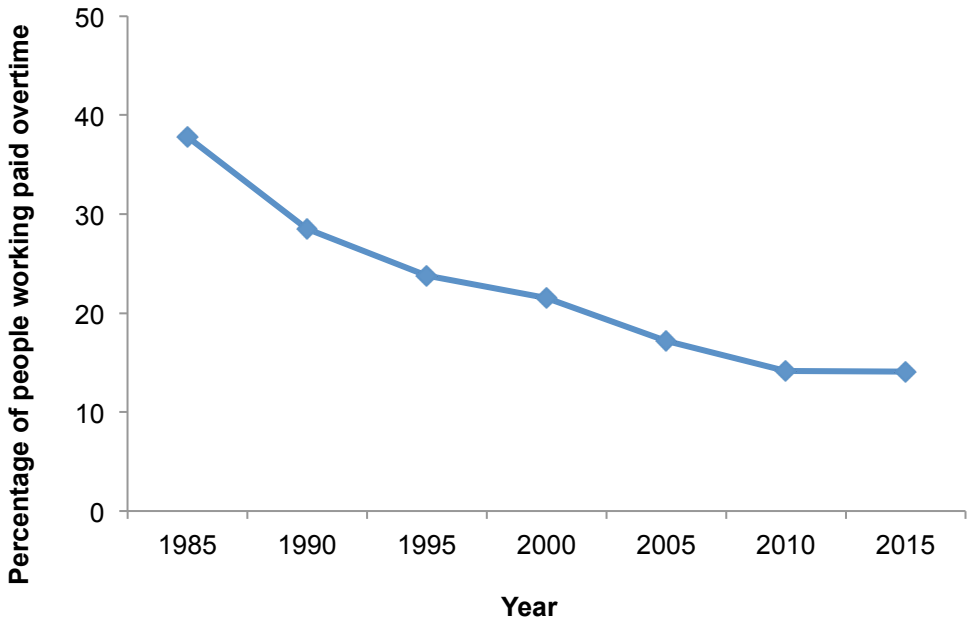
I derived a variable for the usual number of hours worked to estimate the percentage of people who work more than the 48-hour limit. Considering overtime as part of work insecurity gives an insight into how working life

impacts on people's social, family, and private lives. It is generally believed that working long hours, and doing shift work, which is often associated with working anti-social hours (night-time and weekends), contribute to worse levels of well-being and weakened social ties (Standing, 2011). In addition, whether employees are looking for another job is a way to measure changes in the quality of people's working lives across time. This section thus explores the changes from 1985 to 2015 in the proportions of employees (1) working more than 48 hours a week, (2) doing shift work, and (3) looking for another job in search for better working conditions.

Comparing different age groups across the time periods, everyone is better off now in that proportionately fewer people work more than 48 hours a week. This decline in working paid overtime has been a steady trend since, as shown in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3

The percentage of people working paid overtime between 1985 and 2015 in England



This is particularly true for the young entrants where we see the biggest drop of 10% (chi2=270, p<0.001). In addition, going from the most likely group to work overtime, young entrants are now the least likely group to do so. This is supported by the changes in the reported paid and unpaid overtime hours done by employees. There has been a substantial drop in the proportion of employees doing paid overtime in every age category, with an overall decrease of 23.7% from 37.8 to 14.1% and with a 22.8% decrease for young entrants (chi2=328, p<0.001). Furthermore, this has not had an effect on whether employees do unpaid overtime as this too decreased over time from 26 to 22.9% for all and from 28.2 to 21% for young entrants (chi2=35, p<0.001). This means *an improvement in working conditions and thus well-*

being for all age groups, with the greatest advantage to those who left FTE in the last 5 years in 2015.

However, the same cannot be said when considering the changes in the occurrence of shift work among employees. Here we find an opposite trend: *there has been an increase in the number of people doing shift work, especially among those who left FTE within the last 10 years.* Although the overall increase is only 3.5%, among young entrants the percentage doing shift work has increased by over 10% (chi2=35, p<0.001). This could mean that even though young entrants are less likely on average to work more than 48-hour work weeks, they are more likely to be working in shift patterns, outside of the regular nine-to-five working day, than all other groups. This could perhaps be due to the increase in proportion of young people working in the service sector which is more likely to follow the contemporary 24-hour society.

Lastly, I consider a variable indicating whether employees were looking for a replacement job and if so for what reason. This is referred to as 'marginal employment', in which workers on precarious contracts would prefer more secure positions (Standing, 1990). For instance, those working part time wanting full-time jobs or those on temporary contracts wanting permanent ones. While these people are indeed in employment, their work insecurity tends to be higher and they are also vulnerable to in-work poverty as their participation in more flexible forms of employment is not voluntary (Standing, 1990). I found that *there has been a slight decrease in the percentage of*

people looking for a replacement job among most of the age groups, especially among the younger portion of the labour market entrants. In both years, the young entrants (0-5 years since FTE) have the highest proportion of people looking for a replacement job (15.8% in 1985 and 12.2% in 2015, change significant at p<0.01, chi2=35). Moreover, young entrants who do seek a replacement job are now less likely to be doing so because of their current job being temporary or coming to an end soon or even in search for better working conditions, as presented in Table 7 below.

Table 7

Distribution of young entrants' reasons for looking for a replacement jobs in 1985 and 2015

Marginal employment status	Year	
	1985	2015
Not looking	84.2%	87.8%
Losing present job	2.2%	1.5%
Present job is temporary	2.3%	1.3%
Better conditions	8.4%	5.3%
Other reasons	2.9%	4.1%
Total	100%	100%

Note. N = 5,075. Pearson chi2(2) = 35 Pr = p < 0.001

Despite the drop in all three reasons just mentioned, the most frequent category remains the search for better working conditions. There is only an increase in the 'other category', which includes undisclosed reasons and

personal reasons such as illness. *Nevertheless, it is not possible to ascertain from these datasets whether the change signals decreased work insecurity or increased labour market insecurity.* Both of these explanations are viable as young entrants might feel like there is not enough demand in the labour market (higher labour market insecurity) and therefore they might want to hold on to the job they already managed to secure. They could also be generally more satisfied with the potentially improved working conditions (decreased work insecurity), which would mean they do not have strong enough reasons to replace the jobs they are satisfied in. This is a pitfall of this comparison and would need more detailed survey questions in order to separate these two opposing conclusions. The support for the former reason of increased labour market insecurity comes from the line of arguments suggesting that the decrease in demand for labour has resulted in higher education being the new 'career' among young people today (Roberts, 2013; Snee and Devine, 2014). Evidence of this has been found and presented in other academic literature and media and has been confirmed in this analysis as well. Between 1985 and 2015 there has been an extensive increase in young entrants with first and higher degrees as shown in Table 8 below.

Table 8

Percentages of young entrants (0-5 years since leaving full-time education) with first and higher degrees in 1985 and 2015

Education level	Year	
	1985	2015
Higher degree	2.2%	18%
First degree	14.1%	42.9%
Other	83.7%	39.1%
Total	100%	100%

Note. N = 5,241 . Pearson chi2(2) = 105 Pr = p < 0.001

Nevertheless, it is still not possible to deduce if this is the result of a increase in labour market insecurity due to which young people choose higher education as an alternative to a job. It could simply be a result of the alleged growth of the knowledge economy which requires young people to get higher levels of education in order to find employment, and thus it would not be a replacement but rather a prerequisite for a job.

With regards to changes in work insecurity for the different sexes, there has been a bigger drop in male young entrants working more than 48 hours per week, although they were and are still more likely than women to be working overtime. There has not been a significant change (both statistically and in terms of magnitude) in the proportion of young men looking for a replacement job between 1985 and in 2015. On average, a lower percentage of young women are looking for a replacement job now but, due to the small sample

size, I was not able to isolate the detailed reasons for this search in either of the sexes separately.

Using the changes in rates of obtaining higher or first degree between 1985 and 2015 separately for each sex, I observe a greater increase among women than men. The increase in the proportion of those obtaining a higher degree is similar for both, around 15%. However, in terms of the increase in getting a first degree, 33% more women now achieve a first-degree level of highest qualification compared to a 24% increase for men. The same applies for comparing the number of young men and women with higher and first degrees in the contemporary labour market. While the percentage of young men with higher degrees (19%) is similar to women's (17%), the percentage of women holding first degrees is around 5% higher. Following the argument concerning the shift towards a knowledge economy, we would expect women to favour better than before, and even better than men, on average, in the contemporary labour market. Their lower likelihood of experiencing work insecurity could be supporting evidence for this.

2.3.3 Employment insecurity

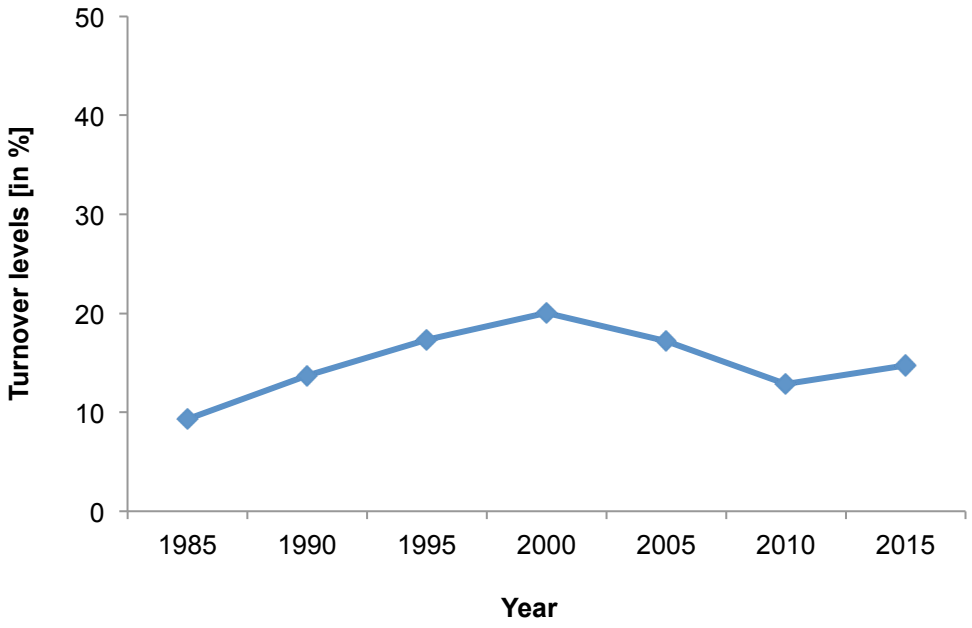
It has been argued that the globalisation of the labour market, and the further shift of power from employees to employers, have resulted in greater focus on short-term profits through more flexible hiring and firing practices that adjust to the stages of the business cycle (Kalleberg, 2009). One such way to achieve this is through fixed-term contracts and high turnover rates, especially among young people (OECD, 2006; Barbieri, 2009). It has already been

shown that there has not been a substantial increase in the percentage of employees with non-permanent contracts, either overall or in each of the age groups.

Regarding turnover, I derived a variable to indicate whether respondents were working for the same employer as they did a year ago, which will be referred to as ‘turnover’, although it is acknowledged that it does not capture the entirety of the concept, as they could have experienced turnover across teams within the same employer. While it is understandable for the young entrants to have the highest rate of turnover in both periods, their turnover rate has almost doubled from 23 to 42% ($chi2=161$, $p<0.001$) since 1985. Nonetheless, there was an increase in turnover for all groups with an average of a 5% increase for all other age groups. *Thus, people are less likely to be with the same employer as a year ago, but young entrants are by far the least likely.* Additionally, while there has been a larger spike in turnover between 1995 and 2005 followed by a decrease, as shown in Figure 4 below, this recovery has not reached the 1985 levels.

Figure 4

The percentage of people who are not with the same employer as 12 months ago between 1985 and 2015 in England



Turning to the gender gap for young entrants, this has closed: in 1985, young women were less likely to remain with the same employer (75%) than men (80%), whereas in 2015 these probabilities are almost the same (58% and 59% respectively). However, it is important to bear in mind, as is the case with income insecurity findings discussed earlier, though the gender gap has closed, both groups are worse off in terms of stability: women's job stability has not risen to catch up to men's levels of security.

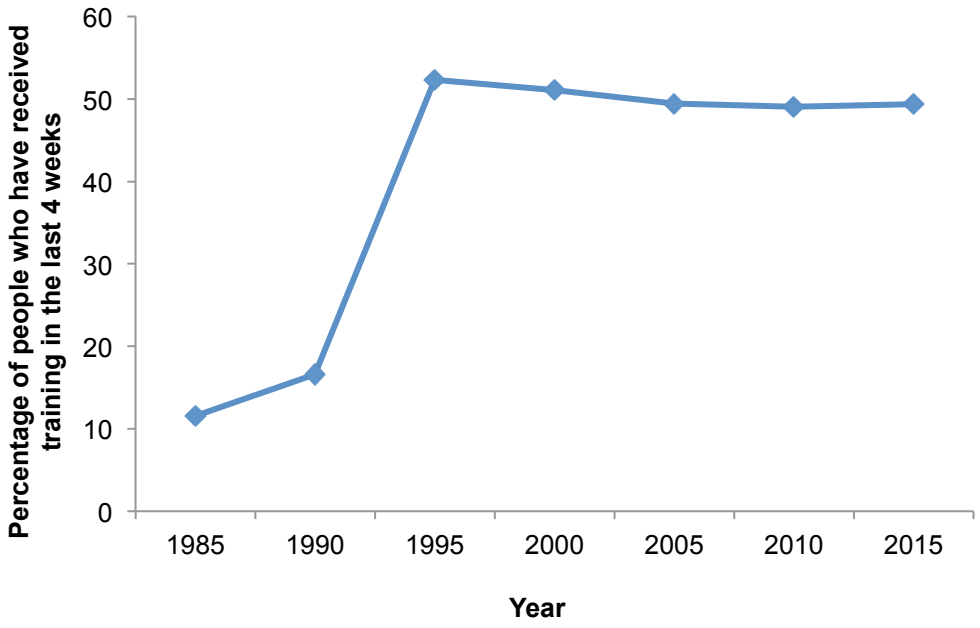
2.3.4 Skill reproduction insecurity

The rise of the knowledge economy has also been seen as one of the most influential reasons for increased levels of insecurity in the labour market for all groups within the labour force (de Ruyter and Burgess, 2003; Kalleberg, 2009; Simmons and Thompson, 2011; Standing, 2014). There has been an increased need for continuous training and acquiring of new skills, which potentially puts everyone who does not keep up at risk of finding themselves in precarity either within the labour force or even outside of it altogether. For young people, this could mean a disadvantageous position due not only to lacking essential skills at the beginning of their labour market careers, but also due to increased competition brought about by the rise in participation of older people. For those already in employment, the lack of skill enhancement could mean increased skill reproduction insecurity, which is now essential.

In order to measure employees' skill reproduction insecurity, the percentages of people who have received job training in the last four weeks were examined for cohorts grouped by their length of time since leaving full-time education. Overall, the probability of job training has increased between 1985 and 2015, however, the majority of the impact occurred between 1990 and 1995 as shown in Figure 5 below. This is perhaps the result of the Digital Revolution, which saw the rise in use of computers and mainstreaming of the Internet.

Figure 5

The percentage of people who have received training in the last 4 weeks between 1985 and 2015 in England



Nevertheless, this probability of receiving training is negatively correlated with time spent in the labour market with younger entrants being the most likely to have received such training. However, when it comes to the magnitude of change, we see differing impacts on the different age groups as displayed in Tables 9 and 10 below.

Table 9

The percentage of employees who have received job training in the last four weeks in 1985 based on the length of time since they left full-time education

Training	Years since full-time education									
	0-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46+
No training	73.7%	84.8%	86%	88.5%	91%	91.9%	94.8%	94.8%	97.3%	97.3%
Received training	26.3%	15.2%	14%	11.5%	9%	8.1%	5.2%	5.2%	2.7%	2.7%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Note. N = 27,029. Pearson chi2(9) = 1219 Pr = p < 0.001

Table 10

The percentage of employees who have received job training in the last four weeks in 2015 based on the length of time since they left full-time education

Training	Years since full-time education									
	0-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46+
No training	44.9%	48%	50.9%	49.1%	52.5%	50.3%	52.1%	52.5%	55.1%	59.5%
Received training	55.1%	52%	49.1%	50.9%	47.5%	49.7%	47.9%	47.5%	44.9%	40.5%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Note. N = 25,038. Pearson chi2(9) = 33 Pr = p < 0.001

Although the percentage of young entrants receiving training doubled between 1985 and 2015, the increase is much bigger in magnitude for all other age groups. While young entrants enjoyed being by far the primary receivers of job training in 1985, by up to 13 times more than when compared to other age groups, this gap has considerably closed in 2015 where the difference is only up to 1.4 times. The older groups have caught up to the young entrants. *This decrease in the difference between the younger and older entrants could thus support the argument of an increasingly widespread*

knowledge economy, as all groups receive job training, no matter how long they have been in the labour market. However, the change has not occurred to the same extent for male and female young entrants. Although in both years women are less likely to have received job training in the previous four weeks, the gap has closed slightly over the years. The increase has been by 25% for men and 32% for women among the young entrants, with the gap between them shrinking from 12 to 5%. Nevertheless, there are still inequalities in the experiences of skill reproduction insecurity for men and women.

2.4 Discussion & Conclusion

The purpose of this analysis was to provide missing empirical evidence on the nature of the changes in experiences of insecurity of young people in the labour market. It set out to test the claims about the increasing levels of insecurity permeating every aspect of young people's lives in the contemporary labour market (de Ruyter and Burgess, 2003; Ecclestone, 2007; Roberts, 2011; Furlong et al, 2011; Standing, 2014; Pultz and Hviid, 2016). These claims have often been unsubstantiated with relevant data, but have become increasingly dominant in the rhetoric used in the academic, political, and media spheres. However, it has been unclear in what ways, and to what extent, the experiences of young people during their transitions from education into the labour market have changed. The main focus was thus to provide an initial look at: (1) the ways in which young people might be more disadvantaged in the labour market compared to other age groups; (2)

whether they have become more disadvantaged over time; and (3) whether they have become disproportionately more disadvantaged over time than other age groups.

Furthermore, women's increased participation in the labour market has been argued to be one of the central reasons for increased insecurity in traditionally male-dominanted occupations. Therefore, it was crucial to include this dimension of change when looking at how the experiences of young people have changed over the last thirty years. In doing this, I explored four of the main areas of security in the labour market using data from the Labour Force Surveys of 1985 and 2015: income insecurity, work insecurity, employment insecurity, and skill reproduction insecurity. As discussed in section 2.2.2, due to the interest being in young people's transitions from education into the labour market, it was more suitable to define young people based on the number of years since they left full-time education, rather than their age.

Regarding income insecurity, all groups are worse off now than they were thirty years ago as the percentage of people working part-time hours has increased for all age groups which potentially limits people's earnings and other benefit entitlements. However, there is very little evidence to suggest that young people are now more vulnerable to entering non-permanent contract positions than other groups. Everyone is also better off when it comes to working overtime (i.e. more than 48 hours a week). This improvement in work insecurity and well-being of employees was found across all age groups, but particularly for young entrants (those out of full-time

education for no more than 5 years). However, they are more likely to be working in shift patterns, which is argued to have a negative impact on social, family, and private life. In addition, employment insecurity has increased in this time period, particularly for young entrants who are even less likely now than those in other age groups to be with the same employer a year later. In other words, everyone is worse off with regards to employment insecurity but young people are disproportionately disadvantaged relative to other groups.

Furthermore, with the increasing development of the knowledge economy in Western societies, skill reproduction forms a key aspect of one's labour market experience. While traditionally younger employees enjoyed more job training than those in other groups, this gap has recently shrunk by around 10%. This means that although people were found to be more likely to have had training within the last four weeks in 2015 than in 1985, other age groups are disproportionately more likely to have experienced such an increase than young entrants. This could point to the threat of increased competition for those jobs traditionally taken up by young people from those in other age groups with similar levels of training or education but higher levels of experience. Overall, the picture no longer seems so clear-cut as is often portrayed in the academic debate, and this analysis has not found clear winners or losers in all the changes that have happened in the labour market in the last thirty years.

Examining gender differences further revealed a more nuanced picture of the labour market and young people's position within it. There are two things to be

learnt from the findings on the different experiences of insecurity in the labour market by male and female young entrants in 1985 and in 2015. Firstly, blaming individuals for socially embedded inequalities that still exist in our societies is questionable. If the knowledge economy had transformed the labour market to such an extent that it is the individual's insufficient education or training that contributes to their higher levels of insecurity, gender differences in my study would be expected to look very different. More women than men among the young entrants now hold higher and first degrees, so it would be safe to assume that they should fare better in terms of access to the different forms of securities than men. However, at best, the gender gap has shrunk by everyone moving down on their levels of security, particularly men moving closer down to women, thus confirming the findings of Vallas and Prener (2012). In addition, women are still more likely to be working part time and to have less access to job training. This brings us to the second point that confirms what de Ruyter and Burgess (2003) maintain in respect to increased female participation in the labour market: the amount of demand might have increased for women, however, such demand remains inadequate and gender-biased by still providing mainly insecure, part-time, non-permanent jobs with smaller chances of job training and thus chances of progression. The advantage women have of increased higher education thus seems to diminish in their progression within employment.

To summarise, I provided evidence that the changes to the labour market over the last thirty years have had very complex and differing consequences that do not fit with the simplistic picture that the literature suggests. For

instance, in terms of income insecurity, in some respects, such as the likelihood of working full time, all age groups are found to be worse off, whereas in other respects, such as non-standard employment contracts, young people do in fact fare worse than they did thirty years ago. Furthermore, with respect to closing the gender gap, overall men's levels of security have now lowered to closer to women's, rather than women catching up with men. Nevertheless, there have also been some improvements for all age groups, particularly with regards to working conditions and well-being. Pointing out the deterioration in certain forms of security, however, should not serve to support going back to a 'golden age', but instead be used to argue for an improvement in contemporary employment and welfare policies (de Ruyter and Burgess, 2003). Furthermore, insecurity needs to be integral to such discussions, rather than relying on unemployment figures to signal any improvement in work conditions, as though job quantity might have improved over time, the same cannot be said for job quality.

The limitations of this study are acknowledged, as it does not include all possible measures of insecurity in the labour market, and does not account for many other characteristics of the respondents. While I did consider a wide range of types of insecurity in the labour market, another crucial aspect is the insecurity outside of it. As discussed in Chapter 1, the drastic cuts and changes to the welfare system, particularly for young people, have created a whole set of insecurities outside of employment (Vallas and Prener, 2012). It is thus important to bear in mind that in addition to the increases in insecurity outlined in this chapter, there are also heightened levels of insecurity for those

in short- and long-term unemployment. Furthermore, self-employment, and employment in the armed forces, carry different risks and levels of insecurity than other types of employment, so should be analysed separately in further research. It would also be of particular interest to quantitatively assess the changing levels of control people have over their working lives as this has argued to have bearing on their overall life satisfaction (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010). Nevertheless, picking apart the experiences of insecurity based on age, or rather the length of time in the labour market, provides a starting point for a more comprehensive evidence-based discussion of young people's experiences in the contemporary labour market.

While this chapter provided the missing empirical evidence on the changing types and levels of insecurity in the youth labour market, the next chapter builds on this by considering the longitudinal nature of youth transitions from education into the labour market. I have shown so far how insecurity has changed for young people depending on the length of time since they left FTE. The next two chapters develop this analysis by considering the progression from FTE into and within the labour market of the same individuals across time, in order to pinpoint the consequences of young people's differing educational and employment experiences on their labour market outcomes.

Chapter 3: The effect of experiences of spells NEET on the occupational security of young people in their transitions from education into and within the labour market

3.1 Introduction

In order to address the needs of the contemporary youth labour market, recent UK governments have pushed what they call an employability agenda. This is particularly true for the 1997-2010 Labour government and the 2010-2015 Conservative-led coalition government, as well as the current Conservative government that developed and dramatically reduced spending on welfare provision as a principal part of their economic plan. The restructuring of the welfare system for young people in the UK has led to state benefits being provided largely on the condition of participation in education, training, or employment (Beatty and Fothergill, 2018). The underlying premise of these policies is based on the notion of individual responsibility as the key factor in securing employment, which has been criticised as being nothing more than a strategy to shift responsibility away from the state (Vallas and Hill, 2012). It is thus open to criticism around ignoring the underlying deficits of sufficient support of and equality in transitions from education into and within the labour market as well as the inherent structural inequalities that contribute to young people's struggles in finding adequate employment (Theodore, 2007; Crisp and Powell, 2017).

The ostensible decrease in youth unemployment numbers might therefore be a product of warehousing young people in education or training of little or no value, or forcing them into insecure forms of employment (Crisp and Powell, 2017). In the past, unemployment was the primary threat to young people's economic position and future work security. As long as young people found employment, even precarious employment, their working life would gradually become less precarious by establishing a steady career route (Barbieri, 2009). However, today the nature of employment young people are likely to acquire also forms a significant threat to their career trajectories, with entry-level jobs becoming sources of precariousness themselves and rarely a stepping-stone into a steady employment (Fryer, 2002; Furlong and Cartmel, 2006; Shildrick et al, 2012; Hardgrove et al, 2015; Pultz and Hviid, 2016). I have demonstrated aspects of this in Chapter 2, where my analysis showed that, compared to thirty years ago, young people in contemporary employment more regularly change jobs and are less likely to remain with the same employer they were with twelve months ago.

With the backdrop of the quality of early employment having a more substantial impact on young people's future than in the past, it is important to assess the impact on young people's transitions from education into and within the labour market of government policies that both diminish welfare support, and are claimed to push young people into employment regardless of its quality or security. Contemporary UK policies are justified based on the perceived negative impact of experiences of NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) on the subsequent ability to secure employment.

While I acknowledge that keeping young people out of NEET might have other benefits, such as prevention of social exclusion, it is nonetheless important to uncover empirical evidence to understand the effects that being NEET has on young people's outcomes in the labour market, and the effects of pushing such groups into any employment. This evidence has so far been omitted from much of the research into whether experiences of NEET actually have a more negative effect on the level of insecurity in subsequent job(s) compared to taking up an insecure job instead.

As I argued in Chapter 1, simply measuring the aggregate levels of youth unemployment and job tenure is no longer an appropriate metric for understanding successful labour market outcomes. This is due to these figures being obscured by the short-term alternatives of participation in education or training, or insecure jobs with little or no opportunity for progression (Peck and Theodore, 2000; de Ruyter and Burgess, 2003). Focusing on the dichotomy between employment and unemployment might thus conceal, and even divert attention from, the real problems of the experiences of insecurity in the labour market (Furlong, 2006).

This chapter builds on my earlier analysis by focussing on different forms of employment insecurity and social stratification rather than simply measuring unemployment levels and tenure. While the previous chapter tested the claims around increased and widespread insecurity in the labour market, this chapter provides the missing empirical evidence about whether the experiences of insecurity at the early stages of labour market entry are

temporary stepping-stones into secure employment or, as posited by many scholars, they do not have an end in sight (Heinz, 2004; Côté and Bynner, 2008; Koen et al, 2012).

Dissecting whether keeping young people in education, training, or employment is just a temporary measure of trying to hide or delay youth unemployment, or a process to support successful transitions into the labour market, is a crucial part of the evaluation of the effectiveness of the current policies in tackling youth unemployment. This chapter takes a longitudinal perspective by considering the trajectories from education into and within the early stages of labour market participation of the same individuals over time. This allows me to look beyond aggregate measures in order to understand the inequality in returns to the differing labour market trajectories of early leavers from full-time education. I do so by using all eight waves of the Next Steps study (formerly known as the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England or LSYPE I) to uncover the effects of experiencing NEET on future security and social stratification in the labour market among a nationally representative sample of young people living in England.

There are two important insights resulting from my analysis: (1) early experiences of insecurity are more predictive of later levels of insecurity in employment than experiences of NEET; and (2) the strongest predictors of later experiences of insecurity are sex and parental responsibilities among early entrants to the labour market. On the whole, it is neither the experience itself, nor the number and duration of spells in NEET, that are a strong

predictor, or even a significant predictor, of labour market insecurity or worsened social stratification experienced by young people later in their transitions. It is, rather, structural factors, and the early entry into insecure employment, that are the key drivers to employment insecurity.

The findings from this analysis thus call the effectiveness of workfare policies into question. They provide the evidence to suggest that simply keeping young people out of NEET is not a successful strategy in improving their labour market outcomes with regards to employment security and improved position within the social stratification system, but rather that it enhances the levels of risk of falling into a precarity trap. It is therefore hard not to consider such policies to be a little more than an instrument of warehousing young people in order to keep them and out of youth unemployment statistics (Simmons and Thompson, 2013; Crisp and Powell, 2017).

3.1.1 Policies shaping youth transitions

Since the 1970s UK policies aiming to tackle youth unemployment have displayed ‘creeping conditionality’ (Dwyer and Wright, 2014) through an increasing emphasis on punitive sanctions and conditional benefits (Crisp and Powell, 2017). Even in the case of Universal Credit (DWP, 2010), which replaced several previous benefits and thus removed their conditionality, the new revisions in effect since 2015 meant welfare support amounts to lower than the sum of the benefits it replaced (Beatty and Fothergill, 2018). After 2010, the imposition of benefit sanctions begun to be used more widely, particularly with regards to Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA), with the incidences

of the sanctions peaking in more recent years (Webster, 2016). For example, it has been estimated by the National Audit Office (2016) that during 2015 the imposition of welfare sanctions alone resulted in overall welfare spending decreasing by £97 million. This is primarily a result of the 2012 Welfare Reform Act being focused on reducing the UK's budget deficit, which has been especially brought about by the 2010-2015 Conservative-led coalition government, and the current Conservative government which followed it.

These austerity measures represent an ideological shift towards personal responsibility by reducing apparent welfare dependency and providing incentives for people to choose paid employment over any other option (Beatty and Fothergill, 2018). In some regards, young people are being given the worst of both worlds: they are labelled 'young adults' as part of the agenda to transfer the responsibility for inability to enter employment from the state to the individual. At the same time, their youth status is maintained in order to justify a lower minimum wage and reduced welfare provisions, and to push them into training programmes or insecure forms of employment (du Bois-Reymond, 1998; Stauber and Walther, 2002; Westberg, 2004; Walther, 2006). Through this process of individualisation of the youth unemployment problem, worklessness and other forms of insecurity have been relabelled as moral and individual problems rather than social problems (Peck and Theodore, 2000; McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005; Cole, 2008).

These workfare policies are based on the assumption that unemployment is the result of an individual's lack of employability that is to be solved by 'up-

skilling' (Peck, 2001; MacDonald, 2011: 434). Employability refers to the ability to obtain employment based on characteristics like skill level and type, and personal attitudes to work. One of the most important criticisms of such policies has been their 'static and simplistic notion of employability rooted in supply-side orthodoxy' focusing on individual shortcomings rather than a structural inequalities (Crisp and Powell, 2017:1785; DWP, 2008, 2010; HM Government, 2011a, 2011b). This is despite the fact that most of the welfare policies implemented since 2010 have had a disproportionate negative impact on those in the lowest income deciles, as well as on women and people with caring responsibilities, particularly for dependent children (MacLeavy, 2011; Adam et al, 2015; Corlett et al, 2016). This could put the aforementioned policies into question with regard to providing support and adequate conditions in which people enter employment. Consequently, it is important to bear in mind that structural factors such as socio-economic background, race, and gender are critical in shaping young people's entry into employment and their subsequent labour market outcomes (Ball, 2007; Maguire, 2010; Farthing, 2015).

These policies have been mainly focused on young people who leave full-time education at the minimum legal age but fail to find employment. While young people can leave full-time education at 16, since 2008 they have had to remain in either training or part-time education alongside paid or unpaid work until the age of 18. Although it would appear that there are many ways to participate in workfare programmes, the primary goal of most unemployment programmes remains ultimately an entry into the labour market, regardless of

the long-term effect. If they fail to do so, young people are encouraged, and often forced, to participate in education or training, supposedly in order to enhance their skills and thus improve their chances of gaining employment. This strand of policy in relation to pushing young people into education and training is explored in more detail in the next chapter, here I focus on the effects of pushing young people into any employment over experiencing spells in NEET.

The push for rapid entries into work was the sharp focus of the coalition government's policies on the youth labour market, but their failure to provide adequate educational qualifications and ensure favourable labour market conditions on the supply side has been argued to have manifested itself in new forms of poverty and disadvantage among young people, such as their continuing participation in unpaid or insecure work (Peck and Theodore, 2000). It is important to stress here that 'adequate educational qualifications' refers to those that can be effectively utilized in the labour market, rather than those delivered by the many employability schemes put in place in order to keep young people out of unemployment figures or keeping them engaged (Crisp and Powell, 2017). Hence workfare has been criticised as being 'not about creating jobs for people that don't have them; it is about creating workers for jobs that nobody wants' (Peck, 2001: 6). On this journey into employment, some young people are still faced with compulsory participation in often short-term and low-quality forms of education and training without appropriate job opportunities available to them upon completion (Walther, 2006).

Several government schemes have been developed to enact these workfare policies and avoid NEET at all cost. These include *The Youth Contract*, aimed to keep people out of NEET by providing subsidies to employers to hire young people, as well as increasing funding for apprenticeships, work placements, and internships. However, each of these types of participation is temporary, as earning these subsidies for employing young people only requires the young person to be employed for six months. Another policy, *Young Person's Guarantee*, started off as an optional offer of work, training, or work experience after six months of claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) but it has moved into being compulsory after ten months of claiming JSA. The *Work Programme* pushed conditionality even further by making participation in it mandatory after receiving JSA for nine months, and applying sanctions for non-compliance. In an effort to address the notion of personal lacks and low employability in terms of personal rather than professional skills, *Mandatory Work Activity* tried to address young people's attitudes to work - any claimant over the age of 18 is required to complete work training that would correct any behaviours deemed to be keeping the young person from getting a job, with failure to do so being yet again accompanied by sanctions.

In short, in the pursuit of the government being able to claim low youth unemployment, the primary goal has been to force young people to enter the labour market. However, not only are the quantity and quality of employment opportunities often low, but those who fail to take them are often obligated to participate in any form of training or education in order to receive their benefits (Farthing, 2015). It is thus fair to question whether the policies in place are

indeed increasing young people's employability, as in their chances of securing adequate employment, or whether it is simply a strategy of excluding them from the count of the unemployed within the labour force, keeping them under surveillance, and leading them into a life of insecure work and benefits.

3.1.2 Wider contextual factors

In addition to changing welfare and employment policies, the general employment context has also been changing for young people. Different groups of young people are thus potentially facing different effects of similar policies in a different context, i.e. a different set of opportunities and obstacles to obtaining secure employment depending on the time period and welfare policies within which they negotiate their employment trajectories (Elder, 1974, 1991; Brooks-Gunn et al, 1991; Crockett and Silbereisen, 2000). The most notable contextual changes to the contemporary youth labour market have been the restructuring brought on by globalisation and de-industrialisation, which saw 'the collapse of the traditional rapid entry into employment in manufacturing and heavy industry within post-industrial cities' (Crisp and Powell, 2017: 1790; Pollock, 1997; Thompson, 2011; Yates et al, 2011). This in turn had the effect of increasing the complexity of youth transitions from education into employment (Jones and Wallace, 1992; Banks et al, 1992; Bynner et al, 1997; Bynner and Parsons, 2002).

As discussed in Chapter 1, this has been argued to be the result of the emergence of the knowledge economy and the subsequent need for more extensive 'identity capital' comprising of educational, social, and psychological

resources needed to find employment, which generally take time to acquire (Côté, 1996). In Chapter 2, I also uncovered evidence to support this notion of an increased need of continuous up-skilling before entry into and movement within the labour market, which could contribute to the increasing prevalence of longer educational routes into employment among contemporary young people. However, young people making a transition from education into employment who come from or experience more disadvantaged circumstances without sufficient support from their families, communities, and government, find themselves under greater pressure and risk of insecurities (Bynner and Parsons, 2002). The entire employability notion is based on a rather middle-class and male notion of empowerment, which does little for those without basic access to the social, political, cultural, and economic capital needed to 'develop oneself' (Skeggs, 2004; Lawler, 2005; Bright, 2011; Kennedy, 2014; Willis, 2014). Consequently, more disadvantaged young people are argued to find themselves in a cycle moving between unemployment and the margins of the labour market, or often, in the case of young women, exiting the labour market early and altogether (Bynner et al, 1997; Coles, 2000). Beside sporadic employment prospects, these young people may suffer further consequences, such as 'difficult relationships, lack of social and political participation, poor physical and mental health, drug abuse, and criminality' (Bynner and Parsons, 2002: 290). Arguably, these are tied deeply to structural factors and thus cannot be addressed through employability schemes, which goes directly against the reasoning of the aforementioned policies.

These lived realities are the major basis on which young people choose to withdraw and drop out from the schemes designed to integrate them into the labour market and society in general, only to be compelled back by workfare policies (Walther, 2006). Young people have to decide between full-time education, training, employment, or awaiting better alternatives (Bynner and Parsons, 2002). However, the last choice is often exclusively available to those who can afford to wait. Due to the conditionality of benefits, those who cannot might end up moving between employment, unemployment, education, and inactivity, which can be classified as representing 'chaotic' trajectories (Crisp and Powell, 2017).

3.1.3 Purpose

It can be argued that the aforementioned workfare policies are more concerned with moving young people out of NEET. This translates to less concern over the quality and duration of employment acquired, and more concern over moving young people off of benefits. It has been argued that previously young people would be able to recover from the initial experiences of precarity in their employment, in which case engagement in any form of work would be preferable to being NEET. However, many have argued that this is no longer the case, and young people who enter precarious employment are likely to get trapped in a cycle of precarity (Fryer, 2002; Furlong and Cartmel, 2006; Shildrick et al, 2012; Hardgrove et al, 2015; Pultz and Hviid, 2016). In this case, the push into employment through the contemporary workfare strategies might be doing more harm than good.

Indeed, there seems to be no evidence for the assumption that any employment is preferable to spells in NEET – one of the assumptions on which contemporary workfare policies are based – beyond the simplistic measures of the levels of youth unemployment and job tenure. The purpose of this chapter is to test this assumption more thoroughly and to understand whether experiences of NEET do in fact hinder young people's chances of obtaining secure employment later on in their transitions, or whether they are a tolerable or even expected part of such transitions and thus bear little to no harm to employment security and social stratification outcomes. In addition, in order to understand the effectiveness of the conditional welfare policies imposed on NEET young people, it is important to unpick whether experiences of spells in NEET have more negative consequences than experiences in insecure forms of employment for those who leave full-time education early. In this vein, this chapter sets out to address the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the impact of early entry into more insecure employment, as opposed to experiencing spells in NEET, on subsequent levels of insecurity and other social stratification outcomes in the labour market among young people?

RQ2: How do the experiences of NEET and of insecure employment differ for young people at different ages in their transitions from education, and with different socio-economic backgrounds?

In order to answer these questions, and the hitherto mentioned problems with the current perception and study of youth disadvantage, research on youth

transitions requires a dynamic analysis (Crisp and Powell, 2017). This is because it is important to look at how disadvantage is experienced at various stages of youth transitions from education into the labour market, particularly with regards to insecurity as a new form of inequality. My analysis will mainly focus on how experiences of NEET, as well as individual and familial factors, contribute to the chances of young people finding and maintaining secure positions within the labour market.

Taking a dynamic approach allows me to analyse the role of experiences of NEET spells at different points in youth transitions in determining levels of insecurity and how they change throughout young people's progression within the labour market. In this context, dynamic refers to a NEET state that can change over time rather than being a fixed or static position. I have adopted the same definition of insecurity in this analysis as in the rest of the thesis, based on a multi-dimensional characterisation as proposed by Standing (2011) and discussed in Chapters 1 and 2.

By taking into account the changing positions and experiences of NEET more closely in young people's transitions from education into work, I develop a better insight into whether experiences of NEET have the same effect at different ages of young people, and whether young people are able to recover from these experiences. It will also be possible to compare the outcomes of those moving into employment earlier as opposed to those with longer or more frequent spells in NEET. While the next chapter focuses on the labour market outcomes of university graduates who stayed in education until

receiving their diploma, this chapter focuses on those who left education early and (with various degrees of success) entered or dipped in and out of the labour market. These young people are of great interest as they tend to start in an already disadvantaged position and are the group at whom most of the welfare policies and governmental discourse are targeted. It is thus important to understand whether the effects of being NEET are indeed scarring to a greater extent than being in the insecure jobs.

3.2 Methodology

3.2.1 Sample

The exploration of youth transitions as a dynamic concept from a nationally representative sample has already been established as necessary to understand the workings of labour market inequality (Crisp and Powell, 2017). It has also been found by Bynner and Parsons (2002) that looking into the very first stages of possible labour market entry is key to tracing and predicting a person's further inability to enter secure forms of employment in every subsequent stage of their labour market career. Therefore, my analysis aims to trace young people's employment status from the time they are allowed to leave full-time education (age 16 for the cohort analysed in this chapter) until a reasonable period of time after this point when they have the opportunity to reach secure employment. To do so, I analyse a sample from Next Steps (formerly known the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England or LSYPE I), which is not only one of the first cohorts to be affected by the raised participation age to 18, but also provides 45 monthly

observations of young people's employment status from September 2006 to May 2010 (at 19/20 years of age), with a follow-up at age 25/26. The employment status of each study participant is recorded as being in one of the following four mutually exclusive categories: education, training, employment, or NEET. The sample was limited to only those living in England. As this chapter is focused on early leavers, only young people who left full-time education at the age of 16 were included in this analysis.

Next Steps is a longitudinal study of a cohort of young people born in 1989-1990, whose data collection started in 2004, when the young people were in Year 9 at state or independent secondary schools across England. There were seven consecutive yearly surveys, following young people from age 14 to 20, with a follow-up interview at age 25/26. During the period when young people were aged between 14-17, both them and their parents or guardians were invited to participate in the survey in order to provide the familial and household background information. In 2007, a boost sample was introduced to give greater representation to minority ethnic groups. The follow-up survey in 2015-2016 recruited a sub-sample of the young people that took part in the first wave, in 2004, even if they dropped out of the study over time. More detailed information on the study can be found on the Centre for Longitudinal Studies website[1].

[1] https://cls.ucl.ac.uk/cls-studies/next-steps/

3.2.2 Variables

The labour market outcomes (LMOs) studied here were primarily chosen for their availability across all 45 waves, and their relevance as proxies for measuring insecure forms of employment and social stratification. In all waves, main activity, Standard Occupational Class (SOC), National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC), and part-time/full-time employment variables were modelled, with the addition of permanent/temporary employment in waves 6 and 7. Due to small sample sizes, particularly at earlier ages when only a small portion of young people were in employment, SOC and NS-SEC were each coded into two categories. In terms of SOC, any respondents with SOC code below 70 (i.e. Sales and Customer Service Occupations) were categorised in the higher SOC group and those with 70 and above in the lower SOC group. For NS-SEC, the higher NS-SEC group is composed of those in Lower supervisory and technical occupations and above, with any positions below being in the lower NS-SEC group.

Disadvantaged positions (within education, social, and economic arenas) tend to operate across generations and so start early in childhood before shaping ensuing trajectories and outcomes in the labour market (Roberts et al, 1994; Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; Bynner, 1998; Breen and Goldthorpe, 2001). It is important to account for this disadvantage in the model in order to separate the constraints of social mobility and the effects of NEET spells on youth labour market outcomes. By modelling the propensity to experience NEET spells as a function of individual and familial characteristics, I have

determined which of these should be in the final model, based on their predictive power and significance. These were: sex; having at least one child; highest level of education; being a carer in the family; highest NS-SEC in the family; and household income. The only exception is 'race', which even though it did not come up as a significant predictor of being NEET, is nevertheless included in the model.

3.2.3 Research approach

Instead of trying to define 'problematic' or 'chaotic' transitions as an absolute concept or a measure of a minimum time (such as in Bynner and Parsons, 2002), my approach begins with the assumption that, in a competition for secure employment, it is more important to consider the position and experience of a young candidate in relation to others in their cohort. Therefore, I aim to study the effects of three aspects of experiencing spells of NEET:

1. Whether participants reported *at least 1 spell* in NEET.
2. The *number* of spells in NEET.
3. The *proportion* of spells in NEET.

The variables are based on the period of time from either the start of data collection or one month after the last main interview, and up to one month before the next main interview. Aspect 1 NEET variable identifies whether a young person reported being NEET in at least one month between the main interviews (hereafter NEET flag). Aspect 2, the number of spells (hereafter spell count), identifies how many distinctive spells of NEET a young person experienced within the observed period. For spell count to be more than one,

NEET spells need to be separated by at least one spell of any other activity. Aspect 3, the proportion of spells (hereafter spell duration), corresponds to the overall number of months reported being NEET divided by the total number of months between the main interviews (excluding the month of the main interview). As opposed to just an indicator of whether the young person experienced NEET or not, the number and duration of spells provide a deeper understanding of whether longer and/or more chaotic (i.e. multiple) spells have a greater impact on levels of insecurity in the labour market.

Furthermore, while other studies have attempted to incorporate the dynamic dimension of youth transitions from education into the labour market by studying the effects of the length of time in NEET status on labour market outcomes, my analysis extends this important feature even further. I consider these NEET experiences at every measured point of the young people's lives as they move from the end of compulsory full-time education into their early stages within the labour market. This approach allows me to discern which points in the transitions have particularly strong effects on labour market outcomes, as well as how previous levels of insecurity in employment affect the following ones. It not only gives an insight into whether young people are able to recover from experiences of NEET and experiences of insecure employment, but also whether this ability to recover changes depending on the time and stage at which these experiences occur.

3.2.4 Models

The final models were constructed in several steps: first, each labour market outcome variable was predicted only by experiences of NEET; second, personal and familial characteristics predicting NEET status were added, to avoid NEET status being a mediator for them; third, from the second main interview onwards, the lag status of each outcome was added in order to control for the most recent labour market experiences; fourth, where applicable, the interaction between the number and length of spells is added to study the effects of continuous versus chaotic transitions. The last two models provide the optimal level of statistical control. These models thus allow for discovering the distinct effects of NEET experiences in predicting the labour market insecurities studied here.

In order to find whether experiences of NEET have a negative impact on labour market insecurity, but also to find the points in young people's transitions where this effect becomes permanent, the analysis was composed of two main stages. Firstly, the impact of NEET was examined on labour market outcomes at the latest wave of data collection available, at ages 25/26, both in terms of NEET flag and NEET spell count and duration (together referred to as NEET indicators). The experience of NEET was based on all 45 months of data collection from September 2006 to May 2010 (age 19/20). The same was repeated for wave 7, which is the last wave of main interviews taking place during the monthly tracking of employment status of young people. In this case, participants who were interviewed for wave 7 in

May 2010 had NEET indicators calculated on all but the last month, i.e. all months not including the month of the main interview (44 months).

The second stage of the analysis considered the transitions year-by-year rather than across the total duration of the study. This meant looking at the outcomes of each main interview as the function of the NEET indicators from one month after the previous interview up to one month before the interview being modelled. For instance, in determining the relationship between NEET indicators and labour market outcomes in wave 6, the NEET flag as well as spell count and duration were calculated for the period of one month after the wave 5 interview up to one month before the wave 6 interview. In wave 4, the start was determined by the start of the monthly collection of employment status (September 2006). In waves 5 to 8, the models also included the lags of the labour market outcome. The lags were included in order to determine whether it is the experiences of NEET or the previous employment conditions that have a greater effect on the levels of security experienced later on. This has an important implication as if experiencing some NEET spells has a weaker effect than the jobs young people get earlier in their transitions, one could assume it to be more important to focus on the quality of jobs available to, and taken up by, young people. This is particularly important for those who are transitioning into the labour market earlier in life, rather than trying to push those in NEET to any employment just for the sake of avoiding their categorisation as NEET and the possibly of paying out benefits.

For illustration, the spell count and duration model for wave 8 outcomes was defined as follows:

$$log\ \frac{p(insecurity)}{1-p(insecurity)} = \alpha + \beta_1 number\ of\ spells + \beta_2 duration\ in\ NEET + \beta_3\ number\ of\ spells * duration\ in\ NEET + \beta_4 y_{w7} + \beta_5 y_{w6} + \beta_6 y_{w5} + \beta_7 y_{w4} + \beta_8 ethnicity + \beta_9 gender + \beta_{10} has\ children + \beta_{11} family\ NS\ SEC + \beta_{12} parental\ income + \beta_{13} family\ education$$

Where p is the probability of a certain labour market outcome, and y_{w4} - y_{w7} are the lags of the labour market outcomes (at waves 4-7).

3.3 Results

The purpose of this analysis was to test whether experiencing NEET spells upon early transition from education into the labour market have more negative consequences on later labour market outcomes than entering insecure employment. This is a crucial part of the evaluation of the effectiveness of the current government policies trying to tackle youth unemployment, which are so far built on a very thin evidential base. These policies are aimed at keeping young people out of NEET as just a temporary measure of trying to hide youth unemployment, or a process to support successful transitions into the labour market.

The results paint a very clear picture of the importance of ensuring good-quality employment is available to young people upon their entry and at the

early stages of their labour market participation. There is little evidence to suggest that experiences of NEET, whether in a single spell or multiple spells, and regardless of duration, have a more negative impact on job insecurity and social stratification outcomes than previous work experiences. In general, neither using whether someone experiences at least one time in NEET, nor using the number and duration of spells as an indicator, had a statistically significant effect on someone being in permanent employment, or on being in the higher SOC or NS-SEC group. Rather it is the positions in which young people were in the previous year of data collection that determine the positions they are in at the time modelled. In other words, it is the jobs they were in a year ago that predict the jobs they are in year later, rather than their experiences of NEET at any point prior to their current job. Specifically, the experience of NEET in and of itself does not have an effect on any of the measured labour market outcomes in wave 8. With the exception of multiple NEET spells having a negative effect on being in the higher NS-SEC group, as can be seen in Table 13, there is no other significant effect of any of the three NEET indicators on any of the four labour market outcomes.

It can be seen that early-stage employment insecurity has much more important impact on later labour market outcomes for young people - as is shown in three of the four measures of labour market outcomes in this analysis. Mostly it is the most recent wave(s) of data collection that are significant predictors of the levels of insecurity in employment at age 25/26. A major policy implication of this is that pushing young people into employment without considering its security, in terms of career progression and stability,

might potentially turn youth transitions into chaotic ones. Young people might end up rotating between being NEET and insecure employment, which is likely to have a negative effect on their career progression into higher socio-economic positions. Firstly, those in permanent positions in wave 7 are 2% more likely to be in a permanent position in wave 8 as well, as shown in Table 11 below.

Table 11

The effect of NEET on being in permanent employment in wave 8

	Model					
	1		2		3	
	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE
Constant	2.3**	1.1	2.3**	1.1	2.4**	1.1
Experiences NEET	0.2	0.5			-0.3	0.9
NEET duration			1.6	4.8		
Single NEET spell			0.3	0.7		
Multiple NEET spells			-0.8	1.3		
Female	-1.3***	0.5	-1.3***	0.5	-1.5***	0.6
Has child(ren)	0.5	0.5	0.6	0.5	0.5	0.5
Permanent wave 7	1.0**	0.4	1.0**	0.4	1.0**	0.4
Permanent wave 6	0.1	0.5	0.2	0.5	0.1	0.5
White ethnicity	-0.01	0.6	-0.03	0.7	0.02	0.6
Family NS-SEC	0.2	0.6	0.2	0.6	0.02	0.6
HH income	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Family education	-0.1	0.1	-0.1	0.1	-0.1	0.1
NEET: Female					0.7	1.0

Note. Number of observations = 613. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

For young people's probability of being in full-time employment at age 25/26, experiences of NEET, whether it be number of spells or duration, do not have

an effect, as can be seen in table 12 below. Equally, previous experiences of insecurity in the form of working part-time in wave 4 to 6 do not have an effect on the same form of insecurity in wave 8. The greatest impact comes from gender differences and having child(ren), which are discussed later in this section.

Table 12

The effect of NEET on being in full-time employment in wave 8

	Model					
	1		2		3	
	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE
Constant	2.4*	1.4	2.5*	1.4	2.5*	1.5
Experiences NEET	-0.3	0.6			-0.1	1.1
NEET duration			-1.5	9.9		
Single NEET spell			-0.2	0.9		
Multiple NEET spells			0.4	2.2		
Female	2.1***	0.5	2.1***	0.5	1.3*	0.7
Has child(ren)	-1.7***	0.5	-1.7***	0.5	-2.7***	0.6
Full-time wave 6	0.1	0.5	0.1	0.5	0.2	0.5
Full-time wave 5	-0.3	0.5	-0.3	0.5	-0.3	0.5
Full-time wave 4	-0.5	0.5	-0.5	0.5	-0.4	0.6
White ethnicity	-0.1	1.1	-0.1	1.1	0.05	1.2
Family NS-SEC	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
HH income	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Family education	-0.1	0.2	-0.1	0.2	-0.1	0.2
NEET: Female					-1.7	1.5
NEET: Child(ren)					0.6	1.5
Female: Child(ren)					2.1*	1.1

Note. Number of observations = 378. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Nevertheless, experiencing multiple spells in NEET between the ages of 16 to 19 decreases the probability of being in the higher NS-SEC group in wave 8 by 10%. This holds true when controlling for the overall duration of the spells. It is thus the fragmented trajectory of moving in and out of NEET that plays a role in this outcome, rather than the duration of the spells. However, those who were in the higher NS-SEC group in wave 6 and wave 7 were 9% more likely to be in the higher NS-SEC group in wave 8 compared to those who were in lower groups at both waves, as shown in Table 13 below.

Table 13

The effect of NEET on being in a higher NS-SEC group in wave 8

	Model					
	1		2		3	
	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE
Constant	0.9	0.6	0.9	0.6	0.9	0.6
Experiences NEET	-0.3	0.2			0.01	0.4
NEET duration			-0.3	1.2		
Single NEET spell			0.1	0.3		
Multiple NEET spells			-1.2**	0.5		
Female	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.6*	0.3
Has child(ren)	-0.5*	0.2	-0.5**	0.2	-0.1	0.5
Higer NS-SEC wave 7	0.9***	0.3	0.9***	0.3	0.8***	0.3
Higer NS-SEC wave 6	0.5**	0.3	0.5**	0.3	0.6**	0.3
Higer NS-SEC wave 5	-0.2	0.3	-0.2	0.3	-0.2	0.3
Higer NS-SEC wave 4	0.6*	0.3	0.5*	0.3	0.6*	0.3
White ethnicity	-0.3	0.4	-0.3	0.4	-0.4	0.4
Family NS-SEC	-0.02	0.1	-0.02	0.1	-0.03	0.1
HH income	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Family education	-0.1	0.1	-0.1	0.1	-0.1	0.1
NEET: Female					-1.0*	0.6
NEET: Child(ren)					0.8	0.9
Female: Child(ren)					-0.8	0.6

Note. Number of observations = 507. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Similarly, young people who were in the higher SOC group in wave 7 are 2% more likely to also be in the higher SOC group in wave 8, as can be seen from the outputs in Table 14 below.

Table 14

The effect of NEET on being in a higher SOC group in wave 8

	Model					
	1		2		3	
	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE
Constant	1.6*	0.9	1.6*	0.9	1.4	0.9
Experiences NEET	-0.3	0.4			0.4	0.6
NEET duration			-0.04	5.0		
Single NEET spell			-0.2	0.6		
Multiple NEET spells			-0.9	1.1		
Female	1.3***	0.3	1.3***	0.3	1.9***	0.4
Has child(ren)	-0.3	0.3	-0.3	0.3	0.6	0.6
Higer SOC wave 7	0.9**	0.4	0.9**	0.4	0.9**	0.4
Higer SOC wave 6	0.3	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.5
Higer SOC wave 5	0.6	0.5	0.6	0.5	0.5	0.5
Higer SOC wave 4	-1.1***	0.4	-1.1***	0.4	-1.1***	0.4
White ethnicity	-0.6	0.6	-0.6	0.6	-0.8	0.6
Family NS-SEC	-0.001	0.1	-0.003	0.1	0.01	0.1
HH income	0.000*	0.000	0.000*	0.000	0.000*	0.000
Family education	-0.2	0.1	-0.2	0.1	-0.2	0.1
NEET: Female					-1.1	1.0
NEET: Child(ren)					-0.9	1.1
Female: Child(ren)					-1.3*	0.8

Note. Number of observations = 468. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

However, I have also identified a sort of ‘forgotten’ period in wave 8, which does not affect the individuals’ current positions. Among the four outcomes studied, the most recent of the previous waves considered tends to be the one most predictive of the current state. For instance, those who had a permanent job in wave 7 are more likely to have one in wave 8, with the

previous wave (wave 6) having no effect on the probability of having a permanent job in wave 8 (all regardless of their experiences of NEET). However, this forgotten period does not hold when looking at wave 7 outcomes. For both SOC and NS-SEC group variables, for which all lags are available (only wave 6 is available for whether a job is permanent), being in the higher category in each of the previous waves is predictive of being in the higher category in wave 7. The greatest effect still comes from the sixth (latest) wave, however, as opposed to wave 8 analysis; in wave 7 all previous waves have an impact. This difference is likely due to the longer gap between the monthly data collection and the main interview in waves 7 and 8, although the possibility of type I error (encountering false negative, i.e. failing to detect a relationship) is acknowledged here.

Nonetheless, even though previous employment experiences do play a role in predicting young people's employment insecurity later on in their transitions, the effect is, in fact, fairly small. The strongest predictors (based on a coefficient standardised to standard deviation) of being in insecure employment at age 25/26 are sex, having child(ren), parental backgrounds, previous employment experiences, and experiences of NEET. As can be seen in Table 14, in the first Model 1 when I look at sex separately, women are more likely to be in the higher SOC group than men. However, introducing an interaction with having child(ren) and experiencing spell(s) of NEET, as seen in the same table in Model 3, the picture becomes much more complicated.

Overall, having child(ren) plays a more important role in this labour market outcome than do experiences of NEET themselves. Young women who have child(ren) and experience being NEET are 2% less likely to be in the higher SOC group than their male counterparts. However, young women without children who experience NEET are 1.5% more likely to be in the higher SOC group than men with child(ren) and experiences of NEET. Young women are thus better positioned than young men to be in the higher SOC group at age 25/26 even when they experience any spell(s) in NEET. However, having children has a significantly greater negative impact on women than on men in securing a job in the higher SOC group. This negative impact of having child(ren) on employment security holds true for being in the higher NS-SEC group, although it does not differ by sex. Both men and women are less likely to be in the higher NS-SEC group if they have child(ren), but this effect is not significantly different between the sexes and between those who experienced spell(s) in NEET, as can be seen in Table 13 Model 3. However, women who experience NEET are 3.5% less likely to be in the higher NS-SEC group than young men who have been NEET at some point during the observation period. They are also 2% less likely to be in permanent employment in wave 8. Interestingly, women are 15% more likely to be in full-time employment compared to men, as can be seen in Table 12. The effect is even starker when considering having child(ren), whereby there is no effect on women's probabilities of having full-time employment, however, men's chances decrease by 27% when having child(ren).

Overall it can be seen that at this stage of labour market participation, being in NEET at any point or for any length of time does not have a significant effect on the labour market outcomes studied. It is, rather, the previous job conditions of the young person, together with their sex and parental responsibilities, that are likely to predict their current job conditions. Looking at the overall trajectories and the NEET indicators in this period does not show much effect of experiences of NEET on labour market outcomes. It is thus important to examine whether the experiences of NEET have an effect on job positions at earlier stages in the labour market. In other words, it is important to uncover whether the experiences of NEET are more likely to result in more insecure jobs at earlier ages, and then set young people off on a path of insecurity.

Looking at the impact of NEET indicators up to wave 4, and between waves 4 and 5, it shows that experiences of NEET do not have an effect on SOC or NS-SEC, however, longer spells in NEET decrease the likelihood of having a full-time job. Yet, the experiences of NEET come into play in the analysis of wave 6 labour market outcomes, at which point young people are aged around 18 and able to leave full-time education. Young people who have experienced at least one spell of being in NEET since wave 5 are less likely to be in the higher SOC group, in the higher NS-SEC group, or in permanent employment in wave 6. In addition, the longer the durations in NEET, the lower the chances of all three of these outcomes. This could possibly be due to increased competition from those young people who have stayed in full-time education up to the compulsory age. They might be entering the labour

market at this stage with higher levels of qualifications that are valued more by prospective employers. This is examined in more detail in the next chapter, which addresses the inequality in the labour market outcomes between young people with different further education achievements. Nevertheless, even in this analysis, the job conditions at the previous wave still factor into the probability of better job outcomes in the current wave.

3.4 Discussion & Conclusion

There are two main insights to take away from this analysis. Firstly, the results show that while it might be disadvantageous to experience periods of time not in education, training, or employment, particularly between the ages of 17 and 18, the effect of such experiences is not as harmful on later employment insecurity as the experience of an insecure job itself. Secondly, the strongest predictors of obtaining secure employment at age 25/26, when early leavers from education should have had a reasonable amount of time to have established a secure position in the labour market, are a young person's sex and their parental responsibilities.

On the first point, while keeping young people engaged and out of NEET might be a beneficial government strategy in terms of tackling social exclusion and anti-social or criminal behaviours, and addressing the needs of the knowledge economy, it is important to note that such a strategy might be operating at the expense of young people's longer-term security in the labour market and their social stratification outcomes. As discussed earlier in this

chapter, the agenda of participation, supported by conditional welfare policies, is focused on either keeping young people in some form of education or training, or by forcing them into any kind of employment. Based on my findings, it is at least fair to question the suitability of the primary aim of government strategies to force young people into any kind of employment, without taking responsibility for the consequences on their later stages of labour market participation. Thus, the strategy of a *conditional welfare system forcing young people into precarious forms of employment early in their transitions might in fact be harming their chances of future employment security and upward movement within social stratification system*. This is based on the findings that their previous employment conditions are a significant predictor of the current one in almost all models measuring all four outcomes – permanent and full-time employment contracts, SOC, and NS-SEC – across the whole time period observed.

There is thus a direct relationship between the social stratification outcomes and the levels of insecurity young people obtain in their early stages of labour market participation and their experiences later in their transitions. While I did observe a certain forgotten period which was not predictive of the later state of insecurity and social stratification outcomes, it has to be pointed out that the latest employment was nonetheless predictive year-on-year. In other words, whilst employment insecurity experienced at 17 might no longer have an effect on employment insecurity at 19, it does indeed impact insecurity at 18, which in turn has an effect on employment insecurity at 19. This could be a reflection of my findings in the previous chapter, which suggest that

contemporary young people are less likely to be with the same employer as they were 12 months prior. Entering insecure jobs, even at a younger age, has a scarring effect on later labour market insecurity, particularly if young people get trapped in these positions for a longer period of time and later in their transitions.

My findings are thus in line with much of the theoretical academic literature, as well as qualitative studies of precarity in the labour market, which posit that early experiences of insecurity are now unlikely to be stepping-stones into more secure careers, but rather they are a labour market position of their own (Fryer, 2002; Heinz, 2004; Furlong and Cartmel, 2006; Côté and Bynner, 2008; Koen et al, 2012; Shildrick et al, 2012; Hardgrove et al, 2015; Pultz and Hviid, 2016). Nevertheless, due to observing the 'forgotten' period of the experiences of insecurity, it could point to the possibility of interventions effectively alleviating insecurity if done at the right time.

It is also crucial to note that experiences of NEET do not have a substantial impact on later experiences of insecurity among early leavers from full-time education. Gaining good-quality and secure employment, rather than being pushed into precarious employment just to keep young people out of NEET, would be a more effective way to ensure better labour market outcomes for them. These findings give greater weight to understanding that government policy efforts are mainly a way to nominally keep youth unemployment levels low, as opposed to ensuring better levels of security.

Nevertheless, simply forcing young people into any kind of employment, and particularly insecure employment, which is often the only kind available at those stages of their labour market participation, is not a beneficial alternative to spells in NEET. Young people are able to recover from experiences of not being in education, training, or employment, however, it is much harder for them to recover from more precarious forms of employment and to move up in the social stratification system. These findings thus challenge not only the effectiveness of the punishing workfare policies, but also the very justification of having these policies in the first place.

There are also wider structural factors at play which have a more substantial effect on young people's experiences of insecurity in the labour market than their experiences of NEET or their employment history. In particular, young people's sex and their parental responsibilities have the strongest impact on their levels of security and social stratification outcomes in the early stages of their transitions into the labour market. These findings can hardly justify the government blaming individuals for their inability to obtain employment due to personal 'lacks'. Young people with children are among the most likely to be dependent on welfare support. The conditionality of the benefit system might thus result in this group of young people becoming particularly vulnerable to unfavourable labour market conditions, and also being further pushed into a precarity trap with little opportunity to escape it.

In summary, for the portion of the population of young people in England that exits full-time education earlier in their life, the punishing governmental

strategies that forced them out of NEET and into employment, regardless of its quality or stability, have been shown to do little more than push them into a cycle of precarity. It is therefore questionable whether government workfare strategies have been put in place to ensure better outcomes for young people by keeping them out of NEET, or whether they are indeed only aimed at warehousing young people in order to exclude them from youth unemployment statistics. I have demonstrated that the latter is more likely to be the case, as I could not find evidence to suggest that experiencing spells in NEET, of any number and duration, have a substantially greater negative effect on employment transitions than entering insecure forms of employment. I have in fact found that time spent in insecure forms of employment was actively more harmful than any experiences in NEET.

It is acknowledged here that the estimates resulting from the analysis might be biased through the sample selection. This bias arises from the posibility of the studied population not being representative of the intended population of early leavers, particularly in later waves of data collection, where the most at-risk of precarity might represent the majority of the study's attrition. It is unclear whether those who are more likely to drop out are more likely to experience NEET spells or be trapped in insecure employment, and thus it is unknown what the direction of the potential bias might be. My sample selection might thus have induced collider bias in the models as certain predictors and the outcomes cause the inclusion of young people in my sample (i.e. leaving full-time education at the minimum compulsory age) (Elwert and Winship, 2014; Munafo et al, 2018).

The next chapter contributes to this assessment of government youth participation strategies by looking at the other portion of young people - those who stay in full-time education even beyond the compulsory period. This addresses the other major focus of government policies by looking at the push towards staying in education or training, as opposed to the push towards employment which was examined here. Furthermore, the next chapter also takes into account the structural factors that are likely to have an impact on youth labour market outcomes, as it has been shown that at least for early entrants into the labour market, these factors are indeed even more important in determining their later labour market outcomes than their employment histories and their experiences of NEET.

Chapter 4: The role of education in reducing insecurity in the labour market among young people from different socio-economic positions

4.1 Introduction

Education has long been perceived as advantageous for gaining quality employment as well as other benefits. Those with tertiary education have for decades benefitted from ever lowering unemployment rates as opposed to their counterparts with lower qualification levels, for whom unemployment has risen in the same time-period (OECD, 2016). Looking beyond higher employment rates, high educational attainment is associated with positive career outcomes and higher occupational status (Flouri and Hawkes, 2008; Faas et al, 2012), and is thus deemed to be key to improving life chances, reducing inequality, and enhancing social mobility (EU, 2011). It is, then, no surprise that it has become high on the political agenda to increase levels of education of young people.

Although this idea is relatively sound, there are several problems that remain overlooked in policy-making discussions. Firstly, many governments, such as that in the UK, have tried to intensify young people's participation in post-compulsory education in parallel with public sector cuts, privatisation of education, growing youth unemployment, and removal of financial support (Snee and Devine, 2014). These declines in government support have also

gone hand in hand with a decline in good-quality education and training (Braconier, 2012).

Moreover, with the frequent changes to the qualifications acquired by young people, it is difficult for employers to assess their value. As a result, employers often deem some of these qualifications, particularly the non-unified vocational education system, to be of low or even no value (Machin and Vignoles, 2006; Wolf, 2011). Secondly, even if government schemes do manage to provide young people with training of any value, qualitative studies suggest that, more often than not, there are no successive higher-level training or employment opportunities available on the completion of the programmes (Lawy et al, 2010; Maguire, 2010). In addition, some argue that the increasingly knowledge-based economy cannot make effective use of the growing numbers of highly skilled young people entering the labour force, especially with the dominance of the more widespread service economy relying on largely unskilled labour (Allen and Ainley, 2010; Keep, 2012). These labour market conditions pose greater risks of both unemployment and underemployment for contemporary young people. Alongside the increasing costs of much post-compulsory education, it is thus essential to assess the effectiveness of such education in providing young people with secure employment upon their entry into the labour market, particularly with regards to its differential impact on young people in different socio-economic positions (hereafter SEPs).

In order to provide a more accurate and grounded assessment of governmental educational policy and labour market outcomes for young people, this chapter focuses on which types of young people benefit most or least from different types of educational achievement based on an analysis of the Next Steps (LSYPE I) dataset. I first provide background to the problems with simply increasing participation in education in trying to improve insecurity in the labour market for young people from various socio-economic backgrounds. The analysis is then split into two steps. Firstly, typologies of young people are established by identifying five distinct socio-economic positions based on young people's familial and individual backgrounds. Secondly, the impact of education on each of these groups' labour market insecurity is estimated.

My findings reveal that education is no longer a safe way to protect oneself from insecurity in the labour market, as it does not provide a universal solution to young people in all SEPs. Although I found no evidence to support the notion of education as an apparatus for the perpetuation of socio-economic inequalities working in favour of the dominant SEPs (Furlong, 2009), the results do show that, for the lowest SEPs, even when engaging in certain forms of further education, they cannot catch up to their high-SEP counterparts. This would thus suggest that lower SEPs have worse chances of progression into the 'right' forms of post-compulsory education in the first place and, even if they succeed, education is not the golden route to meritocracy it is so often praised as by the government.

4.1.1 Shortage of demand for labour

One critique of the current UK government agenda in driving down youth unemployment is that the demand for labour seems to be of little concern to policy makers who are more focused on the supply of graduates, regardless of the jobs available to them (Garthwaite, 2011; Brooks, 2012a). It is therefore questionable whether the strategies put in place are actually aimed at addressing the requirements of the modern knowledge economy, or simply about hiding the real extent of youth unemployment by 'warehousing' young people until an economic boom when their labour would be in demand (Simmons and Thompson, 2013). The reason for increasing educational participation is claimed to be an apparent skills shortage among young people, which results in a skill mismatch between the labour supply and its demand that can only be addressed by participation in further education or training (Cabinet Office, 2008). However, the extent to which this is true is uncertain given the increasing extent of underemployment among young people (Standing, 2011; Shildrick et al, 2012), the low priority given to formal qualifications by many employers (Lawy et al, 2010), and the lack of empirical evidence to support this assumption.

Roberts (2011) argues that the supply of jobs is the decisive factor in engaging in employment for young people, rather than the mismatch between their skills and the occupational requirements. Job supply is further affected by economic cycles, as it takes twice the number of job applications submitted during economic downturns in order to obtain the same number of interviews as in an economic peak (Tunstall et al, 2012). As Galbraith puts it, 'training

and even education are no substitute … for ensuring that good jobs at decent wages are actually available when needed' (2008: 156). In this way, education is argued to no longer be a secure way to protect oneself from a precarious position within the labour market, which raises questions as to the effectiveness of increasing the participation of young people in further education (Vallas and Cummins, 2015). A case in point is the fact that the proportion of jobs said to require no qualification has decreased since the mid 1980's, yet insecurity is claimed to have increased (de Ruyter and Burgess, 2003). Insecurity in this context refers to employment contracts that do not provide sufficient financial compensation to ensure secure living standards, that carry the threat of their ending, or that negatively impact worker's well-being in and out of work (Standing, 2011; Shildrick et al, 2012).

The clear-cut relationship between one's skill level and employment is questionable, and acquiring employment does not necessarily improve young people's positions within the labour market (Devine and Li, 2013). Consequently, the government's strategy of solving the problem of youth unemployment through the aforementioned 'qualification inflation' (Biggart, 2009) leaves us with queries about its effectiveness.

4.1.2 The role of gender in increased participation

Gender is an important factor that needs to be considered when assessing the effectiveness of further education on decreasing the levels of insecurity in the labour market. Even though women tend to have higher levels of formal education than men, overall they tend to be worse off when it

comes to labour market outcomes, such as income, job status, and working hours (Russell et al, 2010; Elias and Purcell, 2013; Aronson et al, 2015). Indeed, the ideal labour market entrant tends to be thought of as a competitive and daring individual - both characteristics usually associated with masculinity (Abbott et al, 2006; Ringrose, 2007; Whyte, 2017). More feminine traits, such as being supportive and collaborative, and with them associated educational and employment routes, such as subject and career choices, tend to be given less value and lower reward in the labour market (Smyth, 2005; Baker et al, 2016). In terms of educational routes, gender expectations tend to be among the factors that shape the chosen fields of study and extra-curricular activities, whereby, for instance, women are shown to be more likely to be involved in community oriented activities whereas men tend to participate in sports clubs (Purcell et al, 2009).

Although these factors might confine one's labour market opportunities (Iannelli and Smyth, 2008), compared to women, men still tend to have higher or at least equal earnings regardless of their field of study, in spite of women having higher entry qualifications than men (Purcell et al, 2013). In addition, due to the punishing strategies of the conditional benefit system, where payments depend on the recipient's compliance, some young people end up being forced by government policies into precarious forms of employment (Furlong, 2006). Women also tend to be more reliant on benefits and social protection than men, so any cutbacks or stricter conditions for claimants are more likely to further deepen gender inequality (MacLeavy, 2011; Brooks, 2012b). Even amongst those participating in higher education, women are

more likely than men to be living in their parental home and have caring responsibilities (Purcell et al, 2009). Nevertheless, some men also face gender-specific problems in the labour market; namely, in their continued roles as bread-winners, men can be forced to accept extensive insecurity in the labour market over unemployment (Hanushek et al, 2017). It is therefore important to unravel how the policies of increased participation benefit each gender with regards to ensuring equal returns to education in terms of security in the labour market.

4.1.3 Research purpose

With these issues in mind, I use the Next Steps datasets to examine youth trajectories from education into the labour market over eleven years (eight waves of data collection) so as to provide a more detailed analysis of the mediating role of education on labour market outcomes for young people in different SEPs. Considering the cuts in welfare and education allowance that have gone hand in hand with increased costs of further education in England, it is crucial to examine the existence and magnitude of the advantages of various forms of participation in education compared with no participation at all (Simmons et al, 2013). This is particularly the case for assessing the effectiveness of achieving various types of higher education degrees, as opposed to entering the labour market earlier in life, in order to gain secure employment over time. It has already been suggested by some scholars that government attention should be shifted from up-skilling of young people towards stimulation of the demand for labour (Furlong et al, 2012), but very little has been done in quantitative terms to investigate the sort of

demand that would be suitable for contemporary young people (Braconier, 2012). Most importantly, there has been no nationally respresentative quantitative longitudinal analysis of the detailed trajectories of young people from education into the labour market beyond comparing levels of income or tenure.

There have been several high-quality studies done on these transitions, such as Hanushek et al's (2017) research on the difference in work outcomes between individuals receiving vocational and general education; Holford's (2017) analysis of the differences in labour market outcomes based on taking up unpaid internships; Shildrick and her colleagues' (2012) research with a small sample of working-class young people in a precarious 'low-pay no-pay' cycle; Roberts's (2011) study of the 'ordinary youth'; DiPrete et al's (2017) study of the strength of school-to-work linkages in the US, France, and Germany; Purcell et al's (2013) analysis of higher-education graduates' transitions into the labour market; and Furlong at al's (2017) local-area study of youth transitions, to name just a few.

However, none of these studies have provided a nationally representative picture of the insecurity in labour market outcomes for English young people based on a detailed analysis of various forms, achievements, and levels of education. Establishing a representative picture of the labour market outcomes of various education and training schemes would improve decision-making among young people in choosing their academic and employment

routes wisely (Leicht and Fitzgerald, 2007; Kalleberg, 2009), as well as potentially better inform government policy.

This chapter addresses several important questions around the potential problems with the increased push on young people towards prolonged participation in education. Firstly, it unpicks the relationship between education and insecurity in transitions into and within the labour market in as much detail as the data allows. Secondly, it challenges the notion of personal responsibility over one's labour market outcomes by considering the effects of structural factors. Thirdly, it puts into question the idea of education being a uniform solution for all young people in escaping precarity. And, lastly, it provides the missing empirical evidence to confront the current conceptions of individual responsibility, on which the government policies tackling youth unemployment and welfare provision are based.

4.1.4 Research aims

In this vein, I aim to answer the following questions:

RQ1: How far does education provide access to secure forms of employment for young people in different SEPs?

RQ2: The government's emphasis on the 'right' choices with regards to participation in education leaves us with a question: which types of educational experience are in fact the 'right' choices in terms of leading to secure employment?

4.2 Methodology

In order to effectively study contemporary young people's transitions from education into the labour market, it is crucial to take a dynamic approach in which the same individuals are observed over their transition periods. This requires a longitudinal dataset based on a big enough sample of young people repeatedly interviewed before leaving compulsory education through to their initial stages of participation in the labour market. The most useful dataset is the Next Steps study (formerly known as the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England or LSYPE I). This survey followed a nationally representative cohort of young people born between 1st September 1989 and 31st August 1990 living in England at the time of first interview in 2004. Participants were interviewed yearly from 2004 for seven years and then one more time in 2016 when the cohort was aged 25/26. The survey includes a diverse range of questions about transitions from education into the labour market, in the context of the worst recession since the Great Depression of the 1930s. The cohort nature of the dataset allowed me to compare participants transitioning from education within the same or, at least, a similar labour market context, with a diverse range of educational qualifications.

With the increasing pressure of government policies aimed at increasing participation in education, this survey allowed me to examine the potential effectiveness of such strategies. By including young people who left education at different levels and with different qualifications, together with the findings from Chapter 3, I investigate the differences in the labour market outcomes between those who pursue higher education and those who enter the labour

market earlier. Furthermore, the survey includes face-to-face interviews with young people and their parents for the first four waves, before moving on to mixed-mode data collection with young people only from wave five onwards. The advantage of this survey lies in being able to take a longitudinal perspective to both parental and individual SEPs of young people as they move into the labour market. In addition, interviewing parents directly, as opposed to depending on young people's knowledge and recall of their parents' SEPs, provides more accurate data.

As all of my outcome variables appeared in wave eight, the sample was reduced to all of those that participated in wave 8, regardless of how many previous waves the respondents were interviewed in. The data collection of the Next Steps study started with an initial sample of young people being drawn to participate in wave 1. The subsequent yearly waves followed young people who participated in the previous wave, with the exception of the follow-up wave 8, which consisted of a sample of young people from the original sample in wave 1. As a result, the final sample of respondents in wave 8 included even those who at some point dropped out of the initial seven waves. This sample was restricted to include only those living in England at the time of the wave eight interview, in order to control for the differing employment conditions and regulations between the different UK countries. The sample was then split between men and women and analysed separately for both sexes. The final sample was composed of 4,281 females and 3,426 males.

The analysis was split into two steps. Firstly, typologies of young people were established and, secondly, the impact of education on labour market insecurity in each of these groups was analysed. The best way to define the differences between groups of young people with regards to their distinct trajectories is to utilise the longitudinal aspect and the breadth of the data collected from both young people and their parents. Trajectories of young people are influenced by their parental SEPs before they are influenced by their own, which makes it important to consider this mobility aspect of youth trajectories. Therefore, using repeated measures of the relevant time-varying characteristics of parental and young person's SEPs is more informative than thinking of SEP as static and arbitrarily choosing a single point in time for such measures. For instance, familial SEP influences young people's experiences in education at various points of the transition, such as when choosing which subjects to take at GCSE and A-Level as well as whether to go to university and which one. This approach is in line with the purpose of my analysis, that is, to study the differences between the groups of young people growing up with trajectories similar to each other but different from other groups, rather than accounting for each characteristic at each point in time as a separate predictor of labour market outcomes.

As my focus is on the mediating role of education in reducing the level of insecurity for various *types* of young people, these *types* are determined using cluster analysis that categorises young people based on their longitudinal SEPS, both parental and individual. The differing effects of education on these groups of young people are observed as the effects of the interaction of

group membership and education on labour market outcomes in a logistic regression model. This model is defined as follows:

$$log\left(\frac{p(Insecurity)}{1-p(Insecurity)}\right) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * education + \beta_2 * cluster\ membership + \beta_3 * (education * cluster\ membership) + \beta_4 * whether\ has\ child(ren)$$

The labour market outcomes used to measure insecurity, the educational predictors, and the clusters generated for this analysis are described in the next section. The clusters allowed me to investigate which forms of educational qualifications decreased the probability of young people being in insecure employment at the start of their labour market participation. I then additionally investigate whether education reduces these probabilities for any particular groups of young people in order to show whether returns of the time, money, and resources put into pursuing it have positive outcomes.

4.2.1 Defining insecure employment

There is no single measure that encompasses the diversity of the insecurity experienced by young people in the labour market. However, using the Next Steps dataset, I study several proxy variables to compare the levels of insecurity between different types of young people in their transitions, based on Standing's (2011) definition discussed in Chapter 1. These are not intended as an absolute measure of insecurity in the youth labour market, but rather as a tool to investigate the returns of various educational achievements on young people's levels of insecurity. Overall, I considered six markers of

insecurity in the labour market, described below. A description of these variables, together with all other variables used in this analysis and their sample sizes, is provided in Appendix A.

My six measures of insecurity are:

1. *Employment status*: I analysed the differences between young people who are employed versus those who are unemployed or inactive at the age of 25/26 (excluding those who are still in, or have returned to, education at the time of the interview). This is a marker of the security of the transitions of young people from education into the labour market, as being employed at the start of the labour market participation trajectory adds to labour market security. However, not all forms of employment guarantee an escape from insecurity and poverty in the contemporary labour market, and thus several attributes of individuals' employment were investigated.
2. *Working hours:* In order to distinguish between secure and insecure transitions into the labour market, particularly for women, I analyse whether they are working part or full time. Those working full time generally benefit from higher income, better representation security, and better skill reproduction security, as well as other benefits (as defined by Standing, 2012).
3. *Stable income*: Zero-hour contracts have been argued to be an insecure form of employment contract potentially affecting income insecurity, employment insecurity, skill reproduction insecurity, and representation

insecurity (see Standing, 2012). Thus, in my analysis, those on such contracts are regarded as experiencing precarity and hence being worse off in their transitions into the labour market.

4. *Stable contracts:* One result of the changes in the labour market has been a rise in highly paid but short-term contracts for fresh entrants into the labour market. Therefore, I look at whether young people's job positions are permanent, ensuring long-term income security, rather than how much they are earning at a particular point in time.
5. *Irregular work pattern:* Shift work is a good proxy variable for work insecurity as it usually includes irregular working patterns and unsociable hours, both of which have potentially harmful effects, particularly for young women. Therefore shift work is treated as an indicator of insecure employment.
6. *Underemployment:* Lastly, underemployment has been an important issue on the agenda of assessing the returns of educational qualifications in the contemporary labour market. With the increased costs of further education, and the investment of time and resources of both young people and their parents, it is undesirable for young people to obtain employment that does not require their highest level of education. In the Next Steps dataset, a variable indicating whether either the highest or even any qualification was needed for a young person to obtain the current job at the time of interview is used to explore the level of underemployment among the youth cohort.

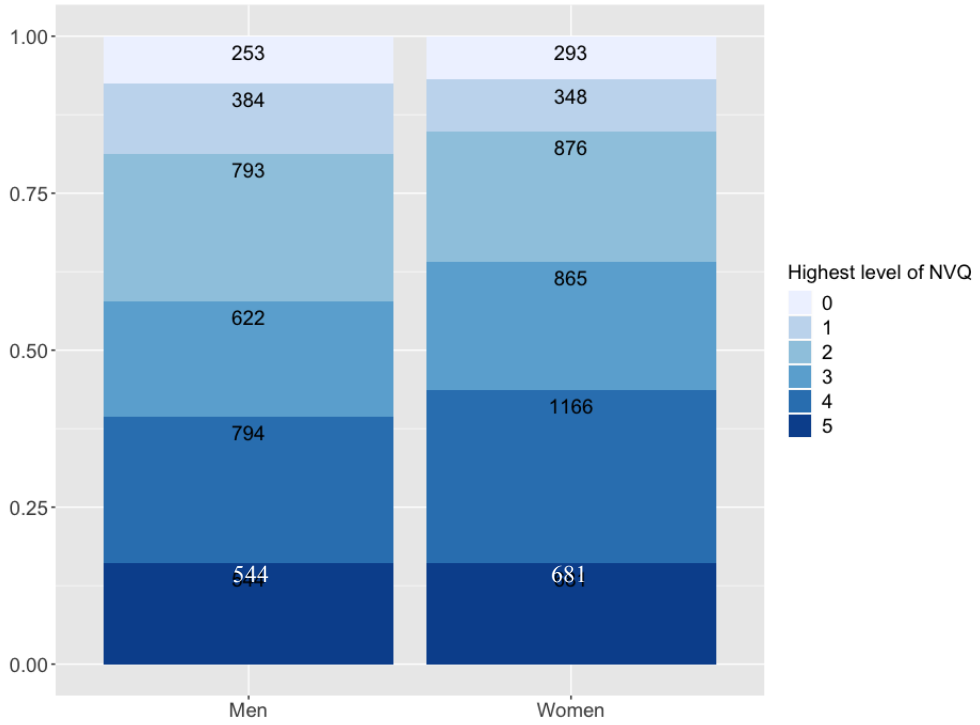
4.2.2 Educational qualifications and attainment

Selection of educational variables was primarily dictated by the availability of variables in the Next Steps dataset. The point was primarily to assess the returns of different types of educational qualifications in terms of their reducing the probability of insecurity of young people in the contemporary labour market. This analysis goes in line with the recent push to prolong participation in education beyond the compulsory age that occurred alongside welfare cuts and higher university fees. I thus assess how different types of graduates benefit from their educational achievements compared with those who, instead of pursuing a higher education degree, started their labour market participation earlier. For this purpose, the following variables were computed from the Next Steps dataset.

Firstly, the highest National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) equivalent was used in order to examine the different levels of precarity between young people who left education at different points in time with different levels of education. There are six levels of NVQ ranging from 0 to 5 with each representing the respective level of NVQ or their equivalents. For level 1, this means 3-4 GCSE grades D-G, for level 2 it is 4-5 GCSE grades A*-C, level 3 represents two A Levels, level 4 is Higher Education Certificate or BTEC, and for level 5 the equivalent is a Higher Education Diploma or a Foundation Degree. Level 0 corresponds to lower or any other qualifications not recognised as an equivalent level of any of the remaining five. The distributions of women's and men's highest levels of qualification are presented in Figure 6 below.

Figure 6

Distribution of young men and women with different highest level of education by age 25.



Secondly, labour market outcomes are compared for those who hold a first degree or higher (36% of women versus 34% of men) and those who do not (64% of women and 66% of men). This higher-education comparison was then extended to look at the differences between young people without a degree and those who obtain degrees characterised as follows: subject area, class achieved, whether from a Russell Group university, and those who did not graduate (that is, those who enrolled but did not achieve a degree). In order to maintain sufficient sample sizes within all cells, degree areas were grouped into four major areas as summarised in Table 15 below.

Table 15

Grouping of degree areas into four major categories

Major Group	Minor Group
Biological Sciences and Medicine	Medicine and Dentistry, Subjects allied to Medicine, Biological Sciences (modal category), Veterinary Sciences, Agriculture
Physical Sciences and Technology	Physical Sciences (modal category), Mathematics, Engineering, Computer Science, Technologies, Architecture, Building & Planning
Social Sciences	Social Studies (modal category), Law, Business & Administrative Studies, Mass Communications & Documentation, Education
Arts and Humanities	Linguistics, Classics, European Languages, Literature, East, Asia, African, American & Australian Language/Literature, Historical & Philosophical Studies, Creative Arts & Design (modal category)

The classification of the more detailed degree areas provided in the survey data into the four major areas was based on the usual classification of the subjects into university departments in England. Figure 7 below shows the percentages of young men and women with degrees in each of the subject areas acquired by the age of 25. Figure 8 provides a more detailed picture of the particular graduate subjects.

Figure 7

Distribution of young men and women with degrees in different subject areas.

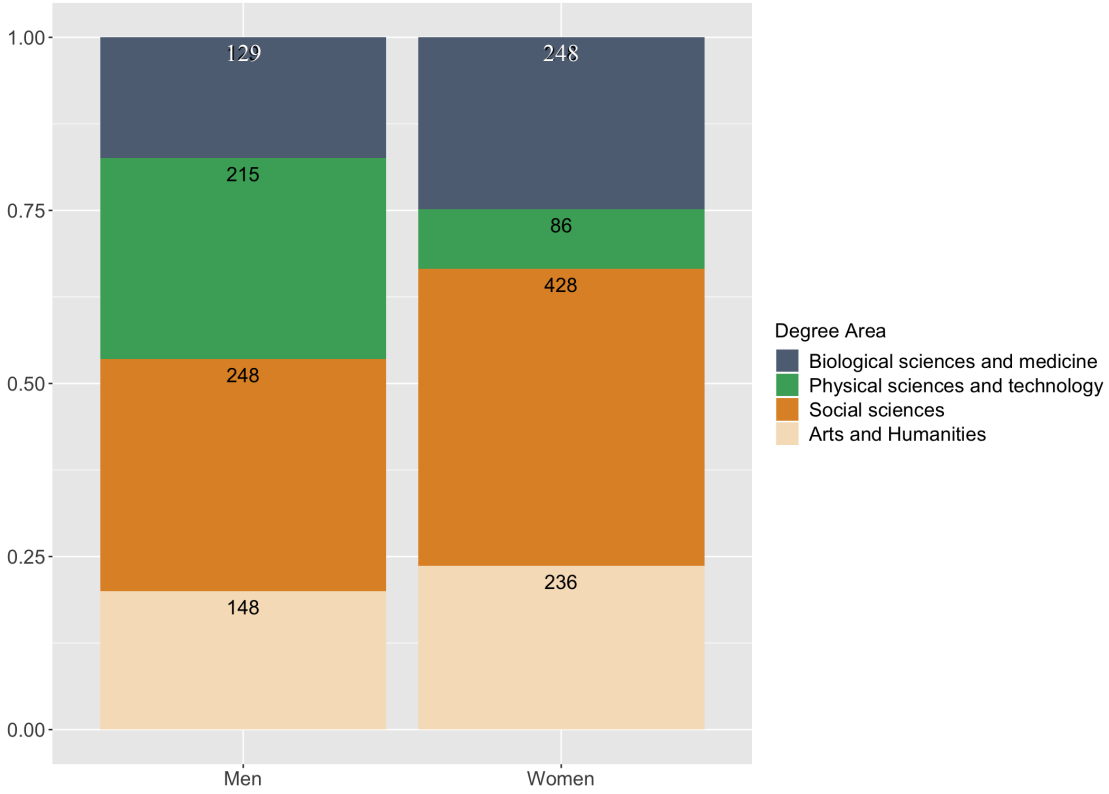
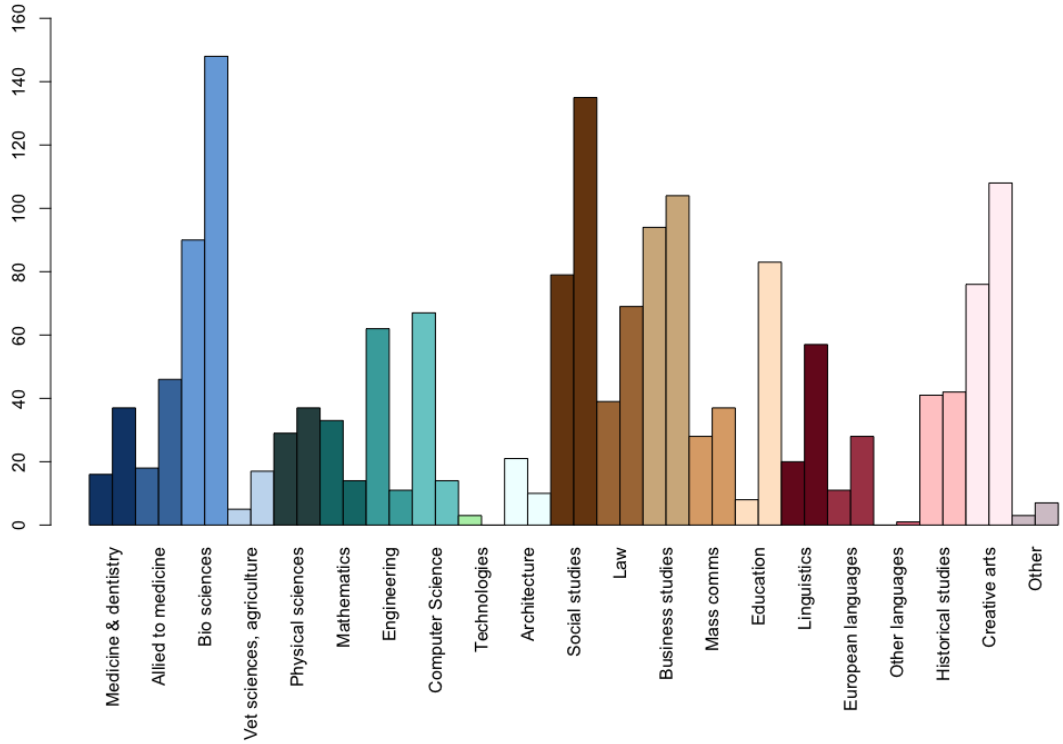


Figure 8

Number of young men (first column in each colour/subject) and women (second column in each colour/subject) with degrees in different subjects.



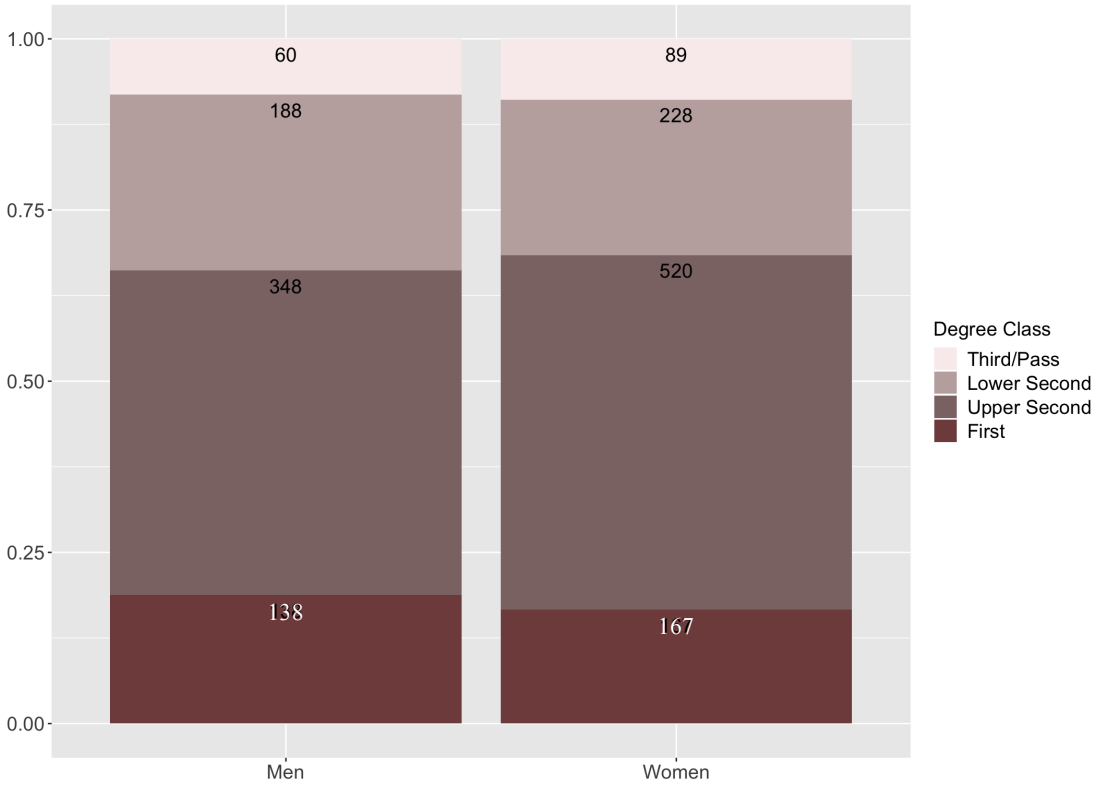
It can be seen that men are still more likely to graduate in physical sciences and technology than women, but less likely to graduate in social sciences. Women who graduate in physical sciences are less likely to do so in mathematics and technical fields, and, among those graduating in social sciences, women are less likely to have business degrees than men. These tend to be subject areas with arguably the highest returns in the contemporary labour market, which already indicates a continuing labour market advantage for men. Women still tend to graduate in more 'caring' subjects such as education, social studies, and certain supportive areas within medicine, and veterinary sciences, which are often undervalued in their returns in the labour market.

In terms of achievement, each class of degree was compared with those who have not achieved a degree at all. As the sample included a mixture of bachelors, masters, and other diploma graduates, the classes were standardised to those of bachelors degrees. Five categories of degree class were thus computed, with the reference category containing those who did not have a degree. The lowest achievement was graduating with a third class honours, ordinary degree, or a pass, followed by lower second class honours (or 2.2), the second best achievement is upper second class honours (2.1) or merit, and finally, the top possible class was composed of first class honours or distinction. The proportion of graduates achieving each class of degree is displayed in Figure 9. The data also show that the results achieved among graduates are very similar between sexes. Overall, the majority of young people graduate with an upper second or an equivalent degree class, thus

potentially leaving those with first class degrees standing out among job applicants.

Figure 9

Proportion of young people graduating with different classes of university degrees



Graduating from a Russell Group university is argued to be advantageous over other universities when seeking good quality employment due to its perceived elite status (Chevalier and Conlon, 2003; Furey et al, 2014). These graduates form around a quarter of all graduates, with minimal differences between men (27%) and women (24%), and I consequently analysed the differences in labour market outcomes between young people who attended

different types of universities, studied different subjects, and attained different levels of achievement. Lastly, I analysed the effect of university attendance for young people who dropped out. There is no direct measure of this in the dataset so I created one by including those who reported having gone to university but who did not have a degree and were not currently attending university. Out of all men who reported to have ever attended a university, 34% did not finish with a degree and were thus considered as young men who dropped out. The same applied to 37% of young women.

4.2.3 Clustering young people

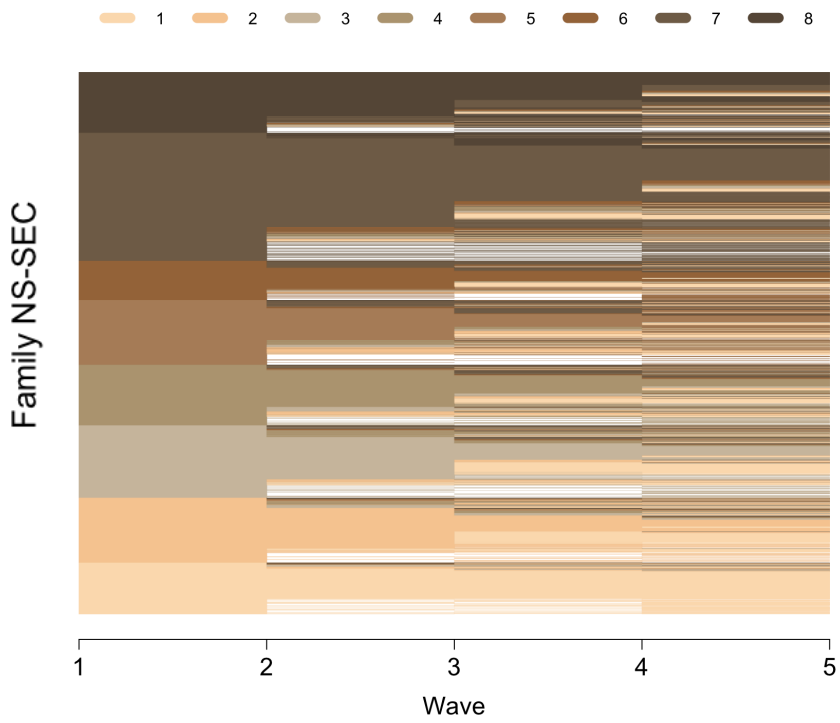
Due to the correlation between socio-economic background and labour market outcomes, it would be expected that education potentially has differing effects for different groups of young people. In my analysis, I identified these groups by using multiple measures of background. I have already argued for including longitudinal measures of all the relevant variables when defining such groups, but I also stress the importance of treating individual and parental backgrounds as dynamic concepts rather than measuring them at a single point in time. To illustrate this point, I derived an NS-SEC (National statistics socio-economic classification) variable from parental NS-SEC in the first four waves of the survey. As socio-economic class is based on the highest occupation held by either parent present in the family, it is not fixed over time. The period under observation was from school year 9, when young people make decisions about their GCSE qualifications, through year 11, when compulsory education ended for this cohort, to year 12, when decisions on higher education are made. Familial social class might thus have an

impact on young people's trajectories from education at every point in time, and changes in the family's NS-SEC might ultimately result in changes in those trajectories.

Figure 10 illustrates the extent of the transitions of families between different NS-SEC over the period of four waves. Each colour corresponds to the major socio-economic grouping in reverse order, so that colour 1 is the lowest class and colour 8 is the highest. The trajectories are sorted by the initial socio-economic group in which the family was at the time of the first wave, and white lines represent missing data for that particular observation at a given wave. It can be seen that there is a fair amount of movement in both directions, to higher but also lower socio-economic classes over time. This emphasises my point for the need to include the longitudinal aspect of young people's background and to create *types* of young people based on such dynamic backgrounds.

Figure 10

Transitions of families' NS-SEC over the first four waves of data collection.



The types were created by conducting cluster analysis of a set of individual and parental characteristics, both time-varying and time-invariant, that were deemed to be important predictors of both educational qualifications and labour market outcomes. For each time-varying variable, the maximum number of repeated measures was based on four waves of the family's NS-SEC, two waves of household income, two waves of the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), and one wave of the highest educational qualification held in the family. The individual backgrounds of young people factored in ethnicity, four waves of their own NS-SEC, five waves of their main economic activity, and five waves of whether they had a paid job alongside education. The coverage of these variables is illustrated in Table 16 below.

Table 16

The coverage of clustering variables across the seven waves of Next Steps study

Wave number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Familial NS-SEC	■	■	■	■			
Household Income			■	■			
Index of Multiple Deprivation		■	■				
Highest Familial Educational Qualification				■			
Ethnicity	■						
NS-SEC				■	■	■	■
Main Economic Activity			■	■	■	■	■
Paid Job Alongside Education	■	■	■			■	■

4.2.4 Missing Data

There are several reasons for missing values in a dataset. This is particularly true for longitudinal studies, which are subject to attrition (that is, the impact of people dropping out of the study over time) in addition to item-missing values (non-response on a particular question or a module) and unit-missing values (non-participation on all questions). Missing data are argued to not pose problems if they can be assumed to be missing completely at random, that is, missing values are caused by factors completely independent of the variables in the analysis. However, this is seldom true in social research. For instance, there might be groups of people that are less likely to participate in the first place (leading to unit non-response) or who drop out over time (leading to attrition) or refuse to answer certain, often sensitive,

questions (leading to item non-response). If this is the case, missing-data patterns could be mainly among people with certain characteristics and thus bias the relationships between the variables in the observed sample compared with that in the population. Therefore, several imputation methods were developed to minimise the potential bias and maximise the data available for analysis.

Selection of the appropriate imputation method generally depends on the assumptions around the sources of missing data and the distribution of the variables in the analysis. In my analysis, the imputation is used solely for the purpose of constructing the clusters and not for the analysis of the relationship between educational backgrounds and labour market outcomes. I employed a method that would require minimal assumptions on the relationships between variables and within variables over time made by a researcher in order to minimise the potential bias introduced by imputation on the results of my further analysis. Before employing an imputation method, the patterns of missing values were explored. As can be seen in Figures 11 and 12 below, the distribution of missing values differs among the variables of interest. I define a missing value to be any type of non-valid value, such as non-response, refusal, and not knowing an answer to an applicable question.

Figure 11 shows the distribution of missing values of all the variables used to construct the clusters. Although most variables have fairly high levels of missingness, Figure 12 shows that this is not necessarily due to high unit non-response. Each line in Figure 12 represents participants with a particular

combination of missing values on the variables of interest. Black lines denote missing values and grey lines denote non-missing values. The pattern reveals a great deal of variety in the combination of values that are missing for each participant rather than complete non-response of many units. In other words, missingness on one variable does not necessarily mean missingness on the others. Therefore, the sample is composed of individuals with different combinations of available information, which made it more helpful in reliably filling in the blanks in the data.

Figure 11

Missing values among clustering variables in descending order

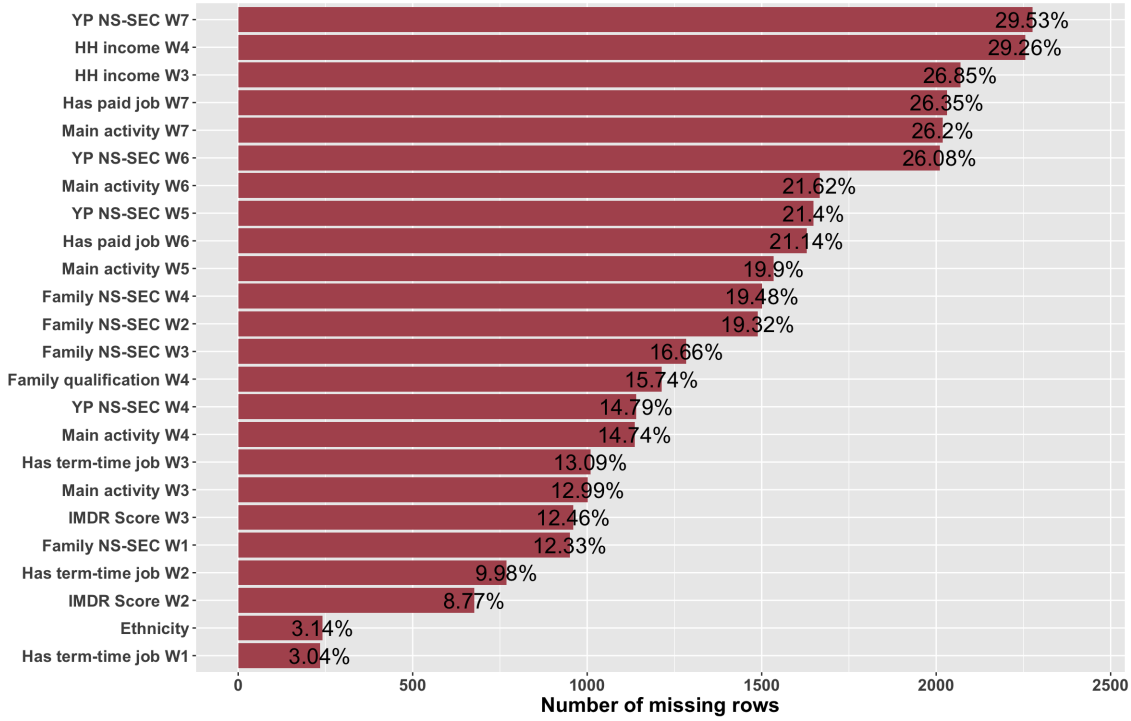
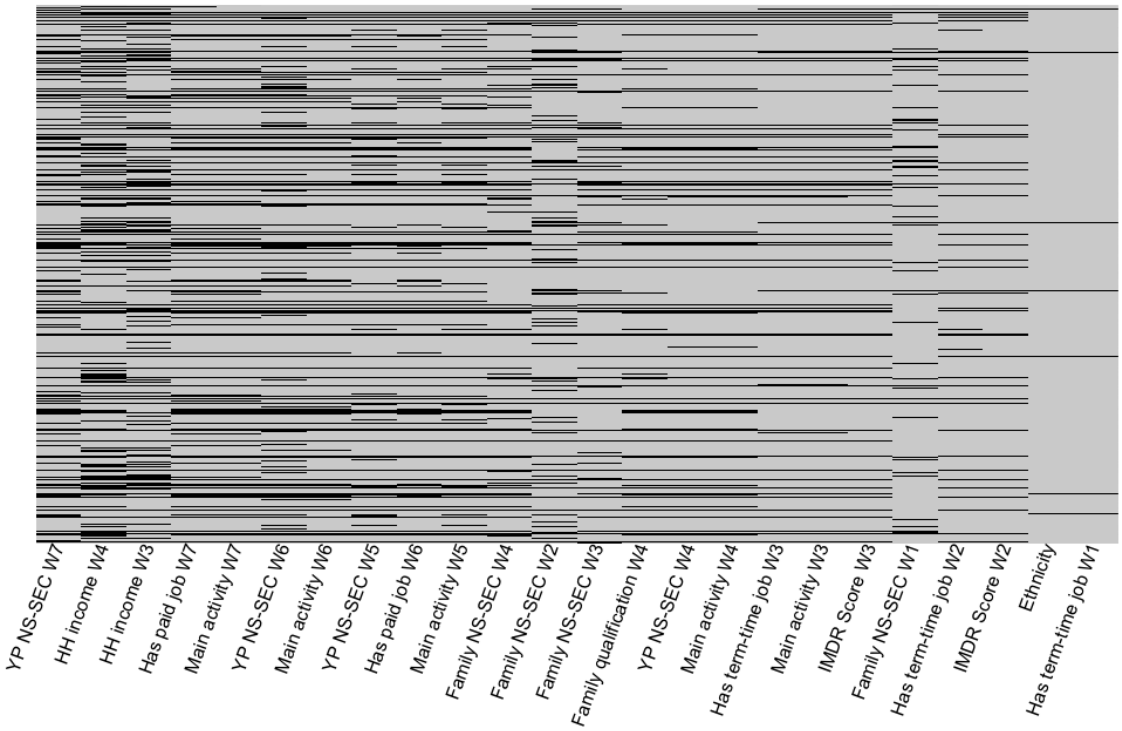


Figure 12

Missing values among clustering variables for each participant



In order to do this, there were a number of considerations to be taken into account. Firstly, the selected variables are a combination of both continuous and categorical variables. This automatically eliminated several imputation methods such as adopting sample mean or k-means clustering. Secondly, as was mentioned in the Methodology section earlier, only those participants who took part in previous waves were interviewed in the next one and certain variables were only measured twice, thus producing different patterns of missingness in the data. Therefore, some of the methods used for longitudinal studies, such as imputing forwards or backwards, would either not work or would not be indicative of any change happening across two waves.

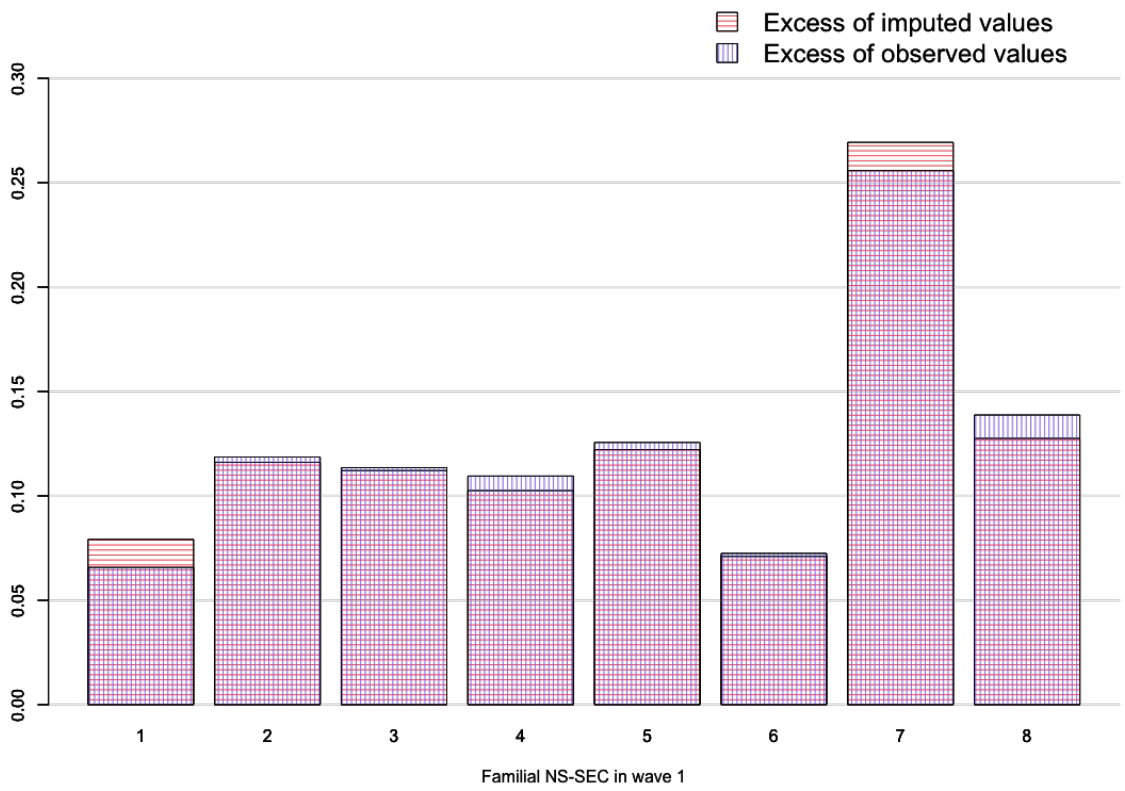
Lastly, adopting imputation methods that rely on a researcher's decision to assign a value to missing data, such as replacing it with the value of the modal category, is potentially replacing one kind of bias with another. As a way of overcoming these obstacles, a nonparametric method of multiple imputation via chain equations was used. Using Random Forest as the conditional model for imputation allowed for automatic fitting of complex, non-linear relations, interactions, and covariate data with no parametric assumptions (Pantanowitz and Marwala, 2008; Shah et al, 2014). In addition, this method works for continuous and categorical variables as both independent and dependent variables, which made it convenient to adopt in my analysis. For a more detailed discussion of the theory behind Random Forests see for instance Shah et al (2014) and Doove et al (2014).

In order to achieve more precise imputation, in addition to the variables used for clustering, ethnicity and educational background were added to the imputation model building. None of the labour market outcome variables analysed were included in this process, in order to avoid creating bias. My analysis thus takes more of a conservative approach, whereby it is more likely to encounter a false negative (type II error: failing to detect a relationship), rather than a false positive (type I error: detecting a relationship when in reality there is none). Multiple subsets of complete versions of the same dataset were created, and the final imputed values were randomly drawn from these distributions. Figure 13 below illustrates the distributions of the observed values of one of the predictors as well as imputed values. The purple/grid area is the proportion of observed and imputed values that

overlap. The size and colour/pattern of the ‘cap’ on top of the overlapping purple/grid bar shows whether too many (horizontal/red cap) or not enough (vertical/blue cap) cases have been assigned to a particular category in the process of imputation, thus diverging from the distribution of the observed values.

Figure 13

Distributions of observed values of young women’s Familial NS-SEC in wave 1 (vertical/blue), imputed values (horizontal/red), and their overlap (purple/grid)



4.2.5 Clustering Method

Based on these variables, cluster analysis was conducted separately for young women and men using Gower distance, partitioning around medoids (PAM), and silhouette width. These three methods were applied in order to calculate the distance between clusters, choose a clustering algorithm, and ultimately select the number of clusters. The purpose of employing a clustering method before the main analysis was dimension reduction of the twenty-four socio-economic predictors listed in Table 16. Clustering allowed for utilising the breadth of all the relevant socio-economic indicators present in the Next Steps dataset, while simplifying them into a single measure for the further analysis purposes. There are several reasons for choosing Gower distance and PAM as the clustering method. Firstly, the socio-economic predictors entered into the cluster analyses are a combination of both categorical and continuous variables and thus clustering method that can handle both had to be chosen. Secondly, a method that would require minimal assumptions on the side of the researcher was preferable in this case in order to not impose a fixed socio-economic stratification structure but rather place young people in different positions based on their backgrounds relative to each other. Thirdly, it was out of the scope of this analysis to provide an in-depth exploration of what determines one's position within a particular socio-economic cluster. While it is in itself an important question to address, within the research of inequality in experiences of insecurity and should be addressed in future research, this analysis focused primarily on the consequences, rather than causes, of differential socio-economic positions of

young people. It is thus believed that using Gower distance and PAM was the most suitable method to address the aims of this analysis.

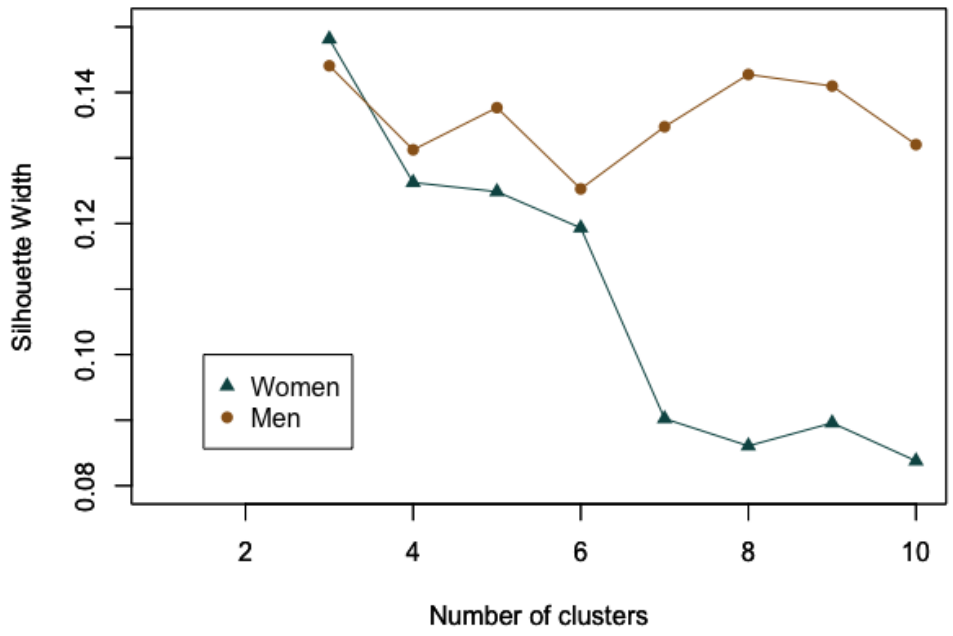
Gower distance is calculated by using distance metrics specific to variable types (Manhattan distance for continuous and ordinal, or Dice coefficient for nominal variables), scaled to a range of values between 0 and 1, with the final distance matrix being calculated from a linear combination using user-specific weights (Kassambara, 2017). As a clustering algorithm I chose to use PAM, which is an iterative procedure composed of the following steps. Firstly, a number of observations were selected to be medoids. The number of observations was restricted to be between three and ten. The lower bound was in place because fewer than three would not allow for enough difference between people from different socio-economic positions to be captured by cluster membership. The upper bound was in place because more than 10 would potentially flatten the variability between the different clusters and produce small cell sample sizes. Without these limits, it would not be possible to produce informative clusters. Therefore, choosing a number of clusters between three and ten was believed to provide an adequate number of socio-economic positions which would be distinct enough from each other, as well as provide the variety of experiences by young people from different backgrounds.

Once medoids were created, every case in the dataset was assigned to its closest medoid based on the Gower distance matrix produced in the previous step. Afterwards, the iterative part of the process was engaged whereby any

case could be reassigned as the new medoid if it yields the lowest distance within its cluster, and if this reassignment happened, all observations are reassigned based on the new medoids. This process is repeated until no changes to the medoids are done. Once the algorithm ends, the number of clusters was chosen using silhouette width, which measures how close the observations are to the cluster they were assigned to, as opposed to the closest neighbouring one (Kassambara, 2017). Figure 14 below shows a graphic illustration of the number of clusters to be entered into my analysis by their silhouette width for women and men, whereby the higher the value on y-axis, the more suitable the number of clusters for the analysis.

Figure 14

Silhouette Width for number of clusters ranging from three to ten for women and men.



In order to conduct comparable analyses of the effects of education on different groups of young women and men, it was beneficial to choose the same number of clusters for both. Based on the silhouette widths of both groups, five clusters was the most appropriate choice. In order to have the same number of clusters for both sexes, the final choice was between choosing three or five clusters, based on their silhouette widths. While three clusters had marginally higher silhouette widths than five, choosing only three different socio-economic positions would not allow for sufficient variability between the clusters and allow enough nuance within them. I have confirmed this through comparing the composition of the clusters in both scenarios, with three and five distinct SEPs. Using only three different clusters hid two major differences compared to using five clusters. Firstly, one between the highest SEP composed of young people from highly privileged backgrounds and the upper-middle SEP. Secondly, one between the lowest two SEPs, separation of which revealed the differing experiences of insecurity among young people from ethnic minority backgrounds with higher levels of education and those from predominantly white families who obtained lower educational achievements. In addition, I have performed a sensitivity check for the imputation by conducting cluster analysis on complete cases only. While the silhouette widths changed for the different number of clusters for men and women, the ideal shared number for both remained five.

One way of assessing the distinctiveness of the clusters created is to visualize them. Figure 15 shows the t-distributed stochastic neighbourhood embedding (t-SNE), for women and men, which is a method of visualizing

multidimensional structures in 2D (Kassambara, 2017). This particular dimension reduction technique displays the relative positions of the observations within each cluster based on their Gower distances. In other words, these graphs translate the positions of the five clusters from a twenty-four-dimensional space (each dimension corresponding to one of the variables used for clustering) into a two-dimensional one, thus making it possible to visualize. As a consequence, neither x-axis nor y-axis has any substantive meaning in terms of cluster compositions and their differences to one another. The order of the cluster assignment from one to five also has no meaning in these graphs, thus comparing the position of Cluster 1 for women and men offers no information on the differences between sexes. Nevertheless, this visualization is a powerful tool showing how well the samples of women and men can be categorized into five groups composed of individuals similar to each other within a cluster but distinctive from young people in all other clusters based on just three unique characteristics: parental socio-economic positions, ethnicity, and individual socio-economic positions.

Figure 15

T-distributed stochastic neighbourhood embedding of the five clusters entered into analysis

The next section outlines the specific distributions of the twenty-four dimensions as well as the educational predictors within clusters of women and men.

4.2.6 Cluster Composition

Given that the cluster number is arbitrary and the cluster itself only gains substantive meaning by looking at its composition and distinctiveness from other clusters, the clusters were reordered to closely resemble the corresponding cluster (containing the same types of individuals) for both women and men. In other words, the clusters were re-ordered so that cluster one has similarly distributed characteristics for men and women. The final order of clusters was established in accordance to what could be considered

as the socio-economic position (SEP) of young women and men within the social hierarchy: the types are ordered to aid interpretation of the results further on. Young people with trajectories characterised by the highest SEP are recorded to be cluster number one with subsequent clusters being ordered decreasingly. The following paragraphs outline the majority distributions of characteristics of young people and their familial backgrounds within each SEP, focusing particularly on features distinctive from other clusters.

Cluster 1 – Higher socio-economic position – forms 14% of the sample of young women and the same percentage for young men and is predominantly composed of white women and men who are both unlikely to have any children by the age of 25. Both women and men in this cluster tend to come from higher socio-economically positioned families in which the majority's parents work in higher managerial and professional occupations in all waves (although with a slightly decreasing percentage represented in this NS-SEC over the course of data collection). These young people also benefit from higher family economic capital (measured by household income of £1,000 or more per week, and the lowest decile of IMD score, suggesting lowest levels of multiple deprivation) and cultural capital (measured by highest level of education held by either parent being a degree or equivalent). With regards to young people's educational trajectories, this cluster contains individuals most likely to remain in education during the observed period, with men only slightly more likely to enter the labour market earlier than women. Nevertheless, both groups are least likely to drop out of degree-level

education, compared to other clusters, and thus most likely to achieve higher education or degree level qualifications. Both sexes are very likely to attain an upper second degree or higher, and most likely out of all clusters to gain degrees in a Russell Group university. Lastly, women in cluster one are more likely to graduate in social sciences, and men tend to do so in physical sciences and technology. Overall, this group appears to be from high status families that are able to pass on their economic and cultural capital in order to produce high-achieving graduates from elite universities.

Cluster 2 – Upper-middle socio-economic position – forms 29% of the sample of young women and 28% of young men, and is predominantly composed of white women and men, with slightly more representation of Asian ethnicities among men in this cluster. One fifth of the women and one tenth of the men in this cluster have at least one child before the age of 25. Both women and men in this cluster also tend to come from fairly highly socio-economically positioned families with the majority's parents working in lower managerial and professional occupations in all waves - although with slightly more volatile movement in the percentage represented in this NS-SEC throughout men's transitions. This group of young people is slightly more divided in their parental economic capital (some with household income of £1,000 per week and lowest IMD scores, and some with household income of £500 up to £599 per week and fourth decile of IMD scores) and cultural capital (higher education or degree level, with a considerable proportion of women's parents attaining no higher educational achievement than GCSE grades A-C or equivalent). As is the case with Cluster 1, these young people

are likely to remain in education during the observed period, with men only slightly more likely to enter the labour market earlier than women. However, they are more likely to drop out than their higher-SEP counterparts, and the majority of them do not achieve a first degree or higher. Out of the 42% of young women and men who do, young people tend to gain an upper second or a lower second degree, and primarily in social sciences or the arts and humanities for women, and physical sciences and technology for men. Interestingly, whereas in the previous cluster, young women were more likely to gain their degrees at a Russell Group university, the ratio is inverted in this cluster, with 30% of men but only 17% of women doing so. This group of young people thus both come from slightly less privileged backgrounds and acquire lower educational qualifications (in terms of level, degree class, and awarding institution) and typically do so in softer sciences compared to Cluster 1.

Cluster 3 – Middle socio-economic position – forms 17% of the sample of young women and same percentage for young men. It is predominantly composed of white men, with slightly more representation of the black ethnicity among women in this cluster. One fifth of the women and a sixth of men in this cluster have at least one child before the age of 25. Women's parental positions are on average slightly higher than men's in this cluster. Their familial NS-SEC tends to be either lower managerial and professional occupations, or lower supervisory and technical occupations, whereas the majority of the young men's families work as small employers and own account workers or in semi-routine occupations. Nevertheless, both tend to

share similar economic capital (household income between £200 and £499 pw and fifth to sixth IMD score decile) and cultural capital (GCSE grades A-C or equivalent to higher education below degree level). Unlike the first two clusters described, young people in this group are much less likely to have remained in education beyond the compulsory period, with men again leaving slightly earlier (at level 2) than women (at level 4). Young people in this cluster who do enrol to universities are almost equally likely to finish as those in cluster 2 (62%) and to do so in non-Russell Group universities with upper second or lower second degrees. Young men in this group are most likely to graduate in biological sciences and medicine. Even though young women in this cluster are still most likely to graduate in social sciences (41%), a quarter of them graduate in biological science and medicine, and this cluster has the highest proportion of female graduates in physical sciences and technology (12%). In general, this group of young women are from families with middle levels of educational achievement and positioned in middle brackets of socio-economic standing, and achieve similar positions themselves at the start of their trajectories from education into the labour market.

Cluster 4 – Lower-middle socio-economic position – forms 17% of the sample of young women and 19% of young men and is predominantly composed of white women and men. Two in five young women (40%) and one in six young men (17%) in this cluster have at least one child by the age of 25. The parental positions are fairly similar between young men and women with the only difference being smaller economic capital of women's families in this cluster (household income between £200 and £399 pw and

IMD score in sixth and seventh decile for women and household income between £400 and £599 and IMD score in fourth to sixth decile for men). Parental NS-SEC tends to be the same as well (semi-routine occupations or lower supervisory and technical occupations), although the majority of young women's parents in this group tend to gravitate more towards lower NS-SEC over time. As for cultural capital, the majority of parents achieved GCSE grades A-C or equivalent or GCE A Level or equivalent. Young people in this cluster tend to have shorter educational trajectories before moving into the labour market. The majority of them start entering full-time employment immediately after the end of the compulsory period and achieve level 2 as their highest educational qualification. Ten percent of men and only three percent of women achieve degree-level qualifications. Young men who enrol onto a university degree are just as likely to finish it as the other clusters (with the exception of Cluster 1), however, the same does not apply to young women, among whom more than half drop out. Those who do graduate tend to do so in social sciences and achieve upper second class degrees. With such a low percentage of young women in this cluster who graduate, it is perhaps no surprise that in the entire sample there is not one woman who has done so at a Russell Group university, which is in contrast to around 16% of men who managed to do so. Overall, this group of young people appears to come from lower socio-economically positioned families and are more likely to 'trade' higher educational qualifications for earlier participation in the labour market and/or childbearing.

Cluster 5 – Lower socio-economic position – forms 23% of the sample of young women and 21% of young men. It is predominantly composed of Asian women and men. One third of young women and a sixth of young men have at least one child by the age of 25. Young people in this SEP come from by far the lowest socio-economically positioned families, with the majority's parents not formally working, or employed in routine occupations. Their economic capital is mainly positioned around household income of £100 to £299 pw and they have an IMD score in the top decile suggesting the highest levels of multiple deprivation. Their cultural capital is arguably the lowest, based on majority of families holding no formal (recognised) qualifications. In terms of educational trajectories, this group is more similar to Clusters 2 and 3, with young people staying in education for slightly longer than those in Cluster 4 (with men slightly more likely to leave early). However, only just over a quarter of young people obtain a first degree or higher. Among those who do enrol into universities, roughly two-thirds finish with a degree. Both women and men are the least likely of all groups to obtain a first class degree. The most common degree area is social sciences, with biosciences and medicine being in second place for women, and physical sciences and technology for men. This group of young women, primarily Asian but also from other ethnic minorities, thus appears to come from lower socio-economic backgrounds with low or no educational qualifications held by their parents, but still achieve fairly high levels of education themselves.

4.3 Results

My primary focus was to establish whether the assumptions of the political agenda of increased participation in education achieves its purpose of improving young people's positions within the labour market. Earlier I discussed the importance of moving beyond simple assessments of this question, which measure aggregate levels of youth unemployment and employment tenure. Global changes to the labour market have transformed young people's transitions from education into employment into more than just a relationship between their levels of education and subsequent income, as neither guarantees security in the contemporary labour market. This begs the question as to what extent higher educational qualifications and attainment provide access to secure forms of employment and, more importantly, how this is affected by young people's socio-economic position (SEP).

In order to explore these questions, I looked extensively into the relationship between seven educational variables and six labour market insecurity measures recorded at age 25/26, listed in Table 12 below. The following sections consider each of the five SEP clusters separately in dissecting the effects of education on their labour market outcomes in order to highlight the differing impacts of education on young people based on the structural inequalities present in the labour market. Within each cluster, only selected outcomes are reported (those significant at $p<0.05$ and believed to be of most interest). These findings are then tied together in the Discussion section of this chapter in order to highlight and discuss the most important findings.

Table 17

List of educational predictor and labour market outcomes included in the analysis

Educational predictors	Labour market outcomes
Highest NVQ level or equivalent	Whether is employed
Whether has a first degree or higher	Whether works full time
Whether has a degree from a Russell Group University	Whether is on a zero-hour contract
Class of degree	Whether job is permanent
Degree area	Whether does shift work
Whether dropped out of university	Whether is underemployed
Whether has done an apprenticeship	

Cluster 1 - Higher socio-economic position

It is perhaps due to the high expectations of this group, given their privileged socio-economic backgrounds, that high achievement tends to be 'rewarded' but low achievement tends to be 'punished' relative to other clusters with regards to labour market insecurity. For instance, having a level one NVQ or equivalent qualification leads to lower probabilities of being in employment for both men and women in this group than having a level zero qualification. The same also applies for women's probabilities of being in full-time employment, which are lower for those with level one or two qualifications than for women with no qualifications at all. Furthermore, achieving an equivalent of a pass/third class degree has punitive effects on

these young women, reducing their probability of being in permanent employment. Likewise, achieving a third class or lower second class degree, or obtaining a degree from a non-Russell Group university, increases the chances of young women in this cluster doing shift work as opposed to those without a first degree or higher. A degree from a non-Russell Group university is comparable to no degree at all when it comes to this group's ability to secure employment. On the other hand, male Russell Group graduates in this cluster tend to fare less well than non-degree holders in being in permanent employment, but this might be counteracted by higher salaries for less permanent positions.

Nevertheless, on the opposite side of the spectrum are the high achievers reaping the benefits of their attainments. Just enrolling into degree-level education (even if not achieving a degree) reduces women's chances of being underemployed in this cluster. Finishing the degree with a first class grade tends to reduce young women's chances of doing shift work, and doing so from a Russell Group university substantially improves their chances of securing employment. Interestingly, the effects of having done an apprenticeship differ for young men and women in this group, whereby it tends to be penalising for women in avoiding underemployment but advantageous for men in escaping shift work.

Overall, my analysis suggests that higher educational qualifications and attainment are a prerequisite rather than an advantage for this cluster of young people, especially young women, in having secure positions within the

labour market at age 25/26. This is in line with Saunders' (1996) argument that education has become a positional good, which does not provide advantages but does penalise those who fail to obtain it, or, as is the case in my findings, those who underperform relative to expectations.

Cluster 2 – Upper-middle socio-economic position

Unlike all other clusters, differing educational achievements do not seem to have substantially different effects on this cluster of young men and women, beyond a handful of factors. Young women in this cluster who enrol into university, whether they achieve a degree or drop out, but especially those who achieve a first class degree, tend to have lower probabilities of being underemployed compared to those without a first degree or higher. In addition, women graduates from Russell Group universities tend to be less likely to do shift work than other university graduates. In contrast, having a third class degree or equivalent has comparable probabilities to those without a degree. For young men in this group, having a degree in physical sciences or technology yields a higher probability of being in employment than any other degree areas, with biological sciences leading to lower chances than no degree at all. Lastly, those men who have done apprenticeships have higher probabilities of doing shift work. The remaining educational variables that were significant overall in their interactions with cluster membership did not have any effect for this cluster in affecting insecurity in the labour market.

Cluster 3 – Middle socio-economic position

This group of young people have fairly similar positions to Cluster 1 in that certain high achievements within education tend to reduce the probabilities of being in insecure employment, and that 'under-achievements' come with greater insecurities. Young people whose highest level of educational qualification is at the NVQ level 1 are less likely to be in employment compared to those with no formally recognised qualifications. The same goes for young women with level 1 qualifications, in their probability of securing full-time employment being lower than those without any qualifications. In order for young women in this group to reduce their chances of underemployment, enrolling into a university, even if not achieving a degree, helps. Additionally, having a degree from a Russell Group university has a positive effect on reduction in unemployment for this group of young people. More young women also tend to avoid doing shift work if they achieved at least a lower-second class degree, and especially if their degree is from a Russell Group university, which has the greatest impact on this group in comparison to all clusters. However, third-class degrees tend to have a punitive impact by increasing the chances of doing shift work.

For young men in this group, the choice of degree area has important implications, with graduates in biological or social sciences having the highest chances of being in employment. Graduates in arts or humanities, on the other hand, end up with worse chances than those of young men with no degree at all. As was the case in Cluster 1, having done an apprenticeship has the opposite effect on men and women in this group. While young men

benefit through a reduction in their probability of shift work, young women instead face greater levels of underemployment.

Overall, certain high educational achievements, sich as higher degree class and university prestige, benefit this cluster, with young women in particular overtaking their higher socio-economically positioned counterparts in reducing their levels of insecurity in the labour market. Nevertheless, it has to be taken into account whether these achievements are plausible for those less well-off in this cluster before using these findings in practice.

Cluster 4 – Lower-middle socio-economic position

This cluster of young people is of particular interest as it showcases the problems with the current 'one-size-fits-all' approach to qualification inflation. While women's probabilities of being in employment are fairly stable across all NVQ levels, men's chances increase by almost 100% going from having no qualifications to holding at least level 1. Achieving a first degree does not appear to help women much either in being in employment, but enrolling and dropping out before gaining a degree improves their chances by around 10%. This is an interesting finding as perhaps simply getting into university might be a strong enough signal for employers to hire these women, but upon completion of a degree the increased competition from other clusters might hinder such opportunities. However, despite their higher employment chances, women who drop out without gaining a degree are more likely to be underemployed in their jobs than those who graduate. For female graduates, class of degree makes a difference in their probabilities of doing shift work,

with those achieving an upper second or a first faring better, but those with a lower second or third faring worse than women without degrees.

For young men in this cluster, having a degree slightly increases the odds of being in employment, however, this only occurs so long as their degree is not in arts or humanities, which has a negative impact on such a probability. Graduating from a Russell Group university is particularly beneficial for these young men in reducing their risk of underemployment and temporary contracts. Degree holders from all other universities are in fact more likely to be on temporary contracts compared to men who did not obtain a degree. Due to not one single woman in this group having a degree from a Russell Group university, the effects of such degrees on any labour market outcomes could not be estimated. However, this is the only group of young women for whom doing an apprenticeship seems beneficial, especially in reducing their levels of underemployment (by almost 20%). Equally, the men in this group who have done an apprenticeship have lower odds of doing shift work later on.

Overall, the data show that the same educational qualifications do not work for this group of young people in reducing their insecurity in the labour market as they did for the other groups. More direct linkages to workplaces through apprenticeships might be more beneficial, whereas the traditional route of increased participation in university does not yield the same rewards, although it requires as much investment in time and money. It is in this group that we are starting to see a more complex picture of inequality perpetuating

through education through both the difference in access to it, and also its positive effect on young people's positions within the labour market.

Cluster 5 – Lower socio-economic position

Despite some positive effects of educational qualifications and attainment, young people in the low SEP cluster are those losing out in the race to obtain secure jobs in comparison to all other clusters. Lower levels of NVQs or equivalent penalise young women in this group by reducing their employment levels (level 1 compared to level 0) and probabilities of being in full-time work (levels 1 and 2 compared to level 0). Interestingly, there is a drop in employment rates for men at level 4 NVQ or equivalent, which could potentially hint at lower demand for such qualification levels among this group.

Although this group of young people benefit from one of the highest increases in employment rates with increasing levels of educational qualifications, they still end up with the lowest employment chances for almost all of the NVQ levels compared to all other clusters. In other words, increased participation has one of the largest effects on this group, but despite this their socio-economic position remains the most disadvantaged. As was the case in Cluster 4, there is a greater penalty for not holding a first degree or higher than there is a reward for doing so, which supports the education-inflation notion. Women without a degree are almost 20% less likely to be employed and more likely to be in part-time employment; however, they are more likely to be underemployed than their counterparts with a first degree or higher.

Additionally, graduates with at least an upper-second degree also fare better in avoiding shift work.

Interestingly, while the effect of graduating from a non-Russell Group university on employment levels is stable across clusters, the effect of graduating from a Russell Group university diminishes with each lower SEP, leaving Cluster 5 with the lowest probability of employment being 80% for women. This effect also differs between sexes in this group in relation to underemployment. While female Russell Group graduates are less likely to be underemployed, men have higher chances of such insecurity compared to other graduates and all men without a first degree or higher. Male graduates in general do, however, favour better in their chances of employment, with biological sciences and medicine seeming to be most desirable. However, those with degrees in arts or humanities face around 10% lower probability of employment compared to their peers without degrees. Lastly, having done an apprenticeship increases the odds of men doing shift work. Overall, the findings suggest that while increased participation in education is associated with the highest decrease in insecurity for young people in this cluster, even this decrease does not help them to catch up to their higher-SEPs counterparts.

4.4 Discussion

The primary focus of the UK and wider European strategies around youth employment in recent years has been based on a push for mass post-compulsory education, particularly focused on increasing individual employability (Roberts, 2011; European Commission, 2016). While the idea behind this strategy is sound, and evidence shows the importance of tertiary education on improved labour market outcomes, my findings point to an important omission in generalising such impact. My findings are consistent with those of Vallas and Cummins (2015) in that education is no longer a secure way to protect oneself from a precarious position within the labour market. The implications thus call current government policy initiatives into question with regard to their effectiveness in tackling youth unemployment and insecurity through qualification inflation (Biggart, 2009).

The current policies in Europe emphasise developing the 'right' skills through the 'right' education or training in order to succeed in the labour market (OECD, 2007; Russell et al, 2010; Braconier, 2012; European Commission, 2016). However, this ignores the structural barriers to both education and employment (Evans, 2007; Furlong, 2009) and the individual choices of young people in deciding their labour market trajectories. The push for the 'right' choices thus seems socially, financially, and morally dubious. As my findings suggest, there is no universal solution in the form of educational qualifications and attainment that would work across all SEPs and both sexes in reducing all (or even most) labour market insecurities in England.

Although certain scenarios have been suggested by my analysis to be effective in reducing these inequalities through the mediating effect of education on SEPs, it is by no means meant to be a guide to what young people in different SEPs should be choosing to minimise their precarity. These scenarios, or choices, might not always be attainable. It is rather questionable to require different socio-economic groups of young people to take up different forms of education in order to achieve the same levels of security in the labour market. The fact that the findings of my analysis suggest that this differential engagement in education is indeed required exposes the on-going structural inequalities in returns from education for different SEPs and sexes. These inequalities were also shown to start in young people's parental backgrounds, which in turn influence both education and employment trajectories, additionally putting the goals of improved social mobility into question.

Although I did not find evidence to support the notion of education as an apparatus of the perpetuation of socio-economic inequalities working in favour of the dominant SEPs (Furlong, 2009), the results did show that for the lowest SEPs, even when engaging in certain forms of further education, they could not catch up to their high-SEP counterparts. It would thus suggest that lower SEPs have worse chances of progression into the 'right' forms of higher education in the first place and, even if they succeed, education is not a universal solution to reducing insecurity in the youth labour market.

These findings are of great importance in connection to various punishing strategies to increase educational participation. Considering pre-existing barriers to certain forms of education, punishing young people for not engaging in the 'right' forms of education is a non-functioning strategy. In reality, young people caught in these punishing strategies are often pushed to engage in education or training of value that has already been put into question (Braconier, 2012) and this has been further corroborated in my analysis. It is ultimately employers who decide on the value of certain levels of education when hiring a young person (Machin and Vignoles, 2006; Wolf, 2011), and this could be one of the reasons for differential returns on educational achievement and, in some cases, even punishing returns to certain forms of educational qualifications and attainment for different SEPs (as was the case of 'under-achievers' within the higher SEPs). A case in point is the finding that certain higher-education outcomes tend to be associated with higher levels of insecurity in comparison to those who entered the labour market without pursuing degree-level education. This is in line with Braconier's (2012) findings that certain degrees yield worse outcomes than others, and Saunders' (1996) claim that education has indeed become a positional good punishing those who do not have it rather than rewarding those who do.

This finding could also be a result of the knowledge-based economy not being able to make use of the growing numbers of highly skilled young people entering the labour market, especially with the more widespread service economy relying on basic labour in terms of qualifications and skills (Allen and

Ainley, 2010; Keep, 2012). The levels of underemployment, especially among female graduates, observed in my analysis could be a testament to this argument, thus putting the policy of increased participation in education into question. Withdrawal of welfare support alongside increasing costs of education and qualification inflation are thus likely to create more barriers than solutions to successful labour market outcomes, particularly for those with lower SEPs.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter examined the trajectories of young people from education into the labour market in the context of their parental backgrounds, with particular focus on the mediating effect of education in reducing experiences of insecurity in the labour market, among young people in different socio-economic positions. Considering widespread welfare cuts and the increased costs of further education, it is crucial to identify the differences in returns from education for young people situated in different positions in the stratification system in contemporary England, and the wider European context. This addresses the gap in nationally representative research evidence on the assessment of current policy efforts in tackling young people's precarity in the labour market, which have been labelled as driving young people into 'expensive waiting rooms' (Furlong et al, 2017).

My analysis shows that engagement in higher education does indeed benefit certain groups of young people in certain respects, however, this is by no

means universal across different SEPs or across different labour market outcomes. For instance, I showed that for the higher SEPs 'underachievement' at a degree level, such as graduating with lower grades or not attending a Russell Group university, resulted in higher levels of insecurity in the labour market, not only in comparison to their better-performing counterparts, but often to those within those same SEPs that did not hold a degree at all. For the middle SEP, graduating with a first degree or higher generally leads to better outcomes, although, as in the higher SEPs, the prestige of university and level of attainment matters. Additionally, the subject matter of their degrees has a more important role in determining their later levels of insecurity in the labour market, with the arts and humanities providing the least secure, and medical and biological sciences the most secure entries. For the lower SEPs, education has the highest returns in reducing insecurity in the labour market, however even with such a substantial reduction, they still do not manage to catch up to their higher-SEP counterparts. Furthermore, apprenticeships tend to be a particularly good way of reducing insecurity for young people in the lower SEPs.

The current 'one-size-fits-all' approach to educational participation is thus found wanting and, in some cases, to cause more harm than good, particularly among the already disadvantaged groups. I have shown this in my analyses by uncovering that, for the middle and the lower SEPs, gaining NVQ level 1 or an equivalent increased the probability of experiencing insecurity compared to not holding any NVQs. Employability programmes not providing qualifications at at least level 2 might thus put young people in a more

insecure position than not providing the level 1 qualification in the first place. This finding is in line with Machin and Vignoles' (2006) argument of some vocational trainings offering little to no improvement to young people's employability. Equally, while apprenticeships are beneficial for the lower SEPs, they result in worse outcomes, i.e. increased insecurity, for the higher SEPs.

However, my analysis has several important limitations. Firstly, while using a cohort of young people born around the same time is beneficial for controlling for some of the conditions in which young people enter the labour market, it does limit the generalisability across other cohorts who might have entered under different conditions. For instance, later cohorts entering employment after a longer period of time since the latest financial crisis might experience different insecurities and different returns from their educational achievements. Secondly, due to the study only being carried out up to the ages of 25/26, it does not allow for the assessment of the effects of further degrees, particularly doctorate degrees, on subsequent labour market outcomes. Even in the case of graduates from first degrees, it would be valuable to follow them further in their trajectories. Despite the differential returns from education, after a certain time within the labour market, different groups might either recover from the initial inequalities quicker or fall further behind. Lastly, while a robust method was used to address missing data in order to construct the SEPs of young people, it is acknowledged that, particularly for some measures with high levels of missingness, a certain

amount of bias might have been introduced into the analysis if such missingness was not random.

Nevertheless, the results point to on-going structural inequalities among young people, starting with their parental backgrounds and continuing with the differential returns from education for different SEPs. While education is often praised as the apparatus capable of abolishing inequality and increasing social mobility, my analysis highlights the fact that the government needs to do a lot more than push young people into further education and punish those who do not. It needs to address not only the structural barriers evidenced here, but also stimulate the demand for labour with varying levels of skill, and ensure adequate provision of secure forms of employment.

The following chapter, my conclusion, ties all three previous analyses into a comprehensive account of the changing nature of, extent of, and inequality in experiences of insecurity in the contemporary youth labour market compared to thirty years ago. In addition, it provides a summary of the key findings on the aforementioned changes, as well as the role of education in mitigating these increased experiences in certain forms of insecurity. This discussion is also accompanied by a discussion of its relevance with regards to contemporary government policies around welfare provision and young people's increased participation in further education. Lastly, it addresses the limitations of my research as a whole and provides direction for future research.

Conclusion

It has been argued that young people's experiences of disadvantage within the labour market have intensified in the last few decades due to a number of global and national changes – both within the labour market and through government strategies – and the pace at which these changes occurred. Most notably, there has been an intensification of globalisation, advancements in technology, neo-liberal deregulation, welfare cuts, and a breakdown of commitment from both employers and employees as long-term planning has shifted into short-term business strategies (Eriksen, 2016). These changes have been supported by the idealised enterprise discourse (du Gay and Salaman, 1992; du Gay, 1996), which is little more than a shifting of responsibility from the state to individuals in order to justify cutting welfare provisions (Vallas and Hill, 2012; Vallas and Prener, 2012). In other words, the increased risks and insecurities experienced in the labour market are seen to be a result of people's individual lacks, rather than as socially embedded inequalities, especially in more neo-liberal countries such as the UK (Thompson, 2011).

As a result, the role of the government has become to force people into education, training, or employment by decreasing the incentive to be out of work, rather than addressing any structural barriers to employment (Ball, 2007; Maguire, 2010; Farthing, 2015). This has been done mainly by increasing participation in education that is said to be the solution to the problems of youth unemployment, inequality, and social mobility (EU, 2011). However, policies aimed at improving young people's transitions from

education into the labour market have not been challenged on their effectiveness beyond aggregate measures of youth unemployment, which tend to hide the inequality and experiences of insecurity within these transitions. Focusing on only the dichotomy between employment and unemployment might thus conceal, and even divert attention from, the real problem of people's experiences of insecurity in the labour market (Furlong, 2006). Specifically, in terms of the nature of the employment they are likely to acquire in the early stages of their transitions into the labour market from full-time education, such as temporary and part-time employment (Furlong et al, 2011; Standing, 2014; OECD, 2016). Equally, considering only job tenure could conceal the real extent of insecurity among those who are staying in jobs *because* they feel insecure (de Ruyter and Burgess, 2003).

These claims about ever-increasing levels of insecurity permeating all areas of the labour market have formed the base of a substantial body of both academic literature and media coverage in the recent years (de Ruyter and Burgess, 2003; Ecclestone, 2007; Roberts, 2011; Furlong et al, 2011; Standing, 2014; Pultz and Hviid, 2016). For instance, Standing's (2014) notion of contemporary workers facing at least one out of seven forms of insecurity (labour market insecurity, employment insecurity, job insecurity, work insecurity, skill reproduction insecurity, income insecurity, and representation insecurity) has been widely adopted in the contemporary literature. However, by the very broad nature of this definition, all workers could find themselves experiencing insecurity at some point in their labour market participation. This claim of the majority of workers being insecure diminishes the usefulness of

such a notion, and hides the nuances of the differing levels of insecurity and the probability of people escaping it among different subgroups within the population. In addition, claims of widespread insecurity have become so widely used that they seem to be viewed as facts, with limited focus on testing them and unpicking the mechanisms through which insecurity arises and is experienced.

There have been some high-quality studies trying to address this gap in the contemporary literature on insecurity in the youth labour market (see Krasas-Rogers, 1995; Henson, 1996; Smith, 2001; Barley and Kunda, 2004; Padavic, 2005), which were discussed in Chapter 1, but these are largely based on theoretical, anecdotal, and qualitative accounts, and focus on aggregate measures of youth unemployment, the flaws of which have already been established. Therefore, in this thesis I provided the missing evidence on the extent and types of insecurities experienced by various groups of young people in the labour market on a nationally representative sample in England. This offers the previously absent empirical evidence needed to challenge these taken-for-granted claims, as well as providing a greater level of detail on the general trends of insecurity in the changing youth labour market. In this vein, I tested the extent and ways in which the levels of insecurity have changed over the last thirty years and unpicked when insecurity arises. I also explored how insecurity is experienced by young people of different sexes, at different stages in their life, in different socio-economic positions, and who have acquired different education or training.

Overall, there is no evidence to suggest that the general assumption of an increase in all aspects of insecurity among all workers is sufficient to explain the findings that I observed in my analysis of the changing levels of insecurity in the last thirty years. However, this is not to say that the complexity should discourage analysts from taking insecurity into account when measuring labour market outcomes and designing public policies and the welfare support system. My analysis of the changing extent to which young people experience different labour market outcomes than they did thirty years ago, but also in comparison to their contemporaries in older age groups, revealed certain trade-offs, rather than an absolute improvement or deterioration in their work quality. More specifically, the proportion of all workers in part-time jobs has increased from 29% to 35% between 1985 and 2015, and varying hours week-on-week have increased from 34% to 40% of all workers, thus making everyone worse off in terms of these aspects of income and work insecurity in the contemporary labour market. At the same time, all age groups are less likely to be working overtime, thus potentially seeing an improvement in work-life balance and well-being.

Furthermore, in terms of being on a permanent contract, all age groups are enjoying the same levels of security as they did thirty years ago. However, 10% more young people are now doing shift work compared to 1985. Whereas the increase in turnover among older workers was only 5%, for young entrants the turnover has doubled. Lastly, all age groups are more likely to be receiving on-the-job training, but young people have higher skill reproduction insecurity than older workers. This could point to the threat of

increased competition for those jobs traditionally taken up by young people from those in other age groups with similar levels of training or education but higher levels of experience. Equally, women are less likely to receive training in the contemporary labour market than men, thus facing higher levels of skill reproduction insecurity. Despite this difference between men and women, the gender gap in terms of insecurity has indeed narrowed over the last thirty years, however, this has been primarily due to the worsening of work conditions among men, rather than women catching up to the levels of security previously enjoyed by men.

These findings have important implications, as the success in transition from education into the labour market is predictive of wider improved life outcomes in the future, including better health and well-being (Faas et al, 2012). This success refers to not only positive labour market outputs (i.e. successfully acquiring a job after entering the labour market) but also outcomes (i.e. the type of jobs and, particularly, the degree to which they promote security) (Epstein and McFarlan, 2011). What I have shown is that relying only on unemployment figures to chart insecurity distorts the measures of the quality of working conditions and their changing levels – as while job quantity might have improved over time, the same cannot be said for job quality.

Crucially, labour market outcomes for young people differ depending on whether they remain in education or enter the labour market earlier. Both options, education and labour market participation, provide an acceptable alternative to unemployment in the eyes of the government and its

increasingly conditional welfare policies that I discussed in Chapter 3. Therefore, in this thesis I analysed both of these types of route into the labour market – through entering the labour market early, and through staying in further education – and their various effects on young people in different socio-economic positions and their experiences of insecurity in the labour market.

For those young people who entered the labour market earlier, and thus potentially facing spells not in education, employment, or training (NEET), structural factors, such as sex and caring responsibilities, are still the most influential predictors of labour market insecurity. While having child(ren) had an equal negative effect on the probability of moving into a higher NS-SEC group among both men and women, the effect of moving into a higher SOC group was more negative for women. However, women were 15% more likely to have full-time jobs than men, and even more so (27%) if they had child(ren), compared with men with dependent child(ren).

After structural factors, previous experiences of insecurity in the labour market were more predictive of later outcomes than any number or duration of spells in NEET in the same time. Moving into both the higher SOC and NS-SEC groups was determined by young people's positions within these groups in the previous year, although experiences of NEET did have greater negative impact on young women in moving into the higher NS-SEC group, and multiple spells in NEET prior to the age of 25 reduced the probability of being in the higher NS-SEC group by 10%. In addition, the effects of longer

durations in NEET are more negative for moving into the higher SOC and NS-SEC groups, as well as for the likelihood of having a permanent job before the age of 18. Overall, the findings show that pushing young people into employment without considering its security, in terms of career progression and stability, might potentially turn youth transitions into chaotic ones. This can be seen from the evidence that young people are more likely to be able to recover from experiences of spells in NEET than from a history of insecure jobs.

These results raise a number of questions about the focus of government policies on participation, discussed in Chapter 3, which aim to keep young people in education past the compulsory period. These policies are primarily based on participation being seen as beneficial for, among other things, increasing young people's chances of employment, addressing inequality and social mobility, and keeping young people out of unemployment statistics. However, the importance of structural factors comes up substantially in determining the returns in attaining favourable labour market outcomes of various forms of education for young people. While higher levels of education are beneficial for young people in all five SEPs that were examined for many labour market outcomes, young people from lower SEPs still face greater levels of insecurity at all levels of education. For instance, young people from the lowest SEP who hold a first degree or higher experience similar levels of underemployment to those in the highest SEP who do not have a degree. This confirms the notion of education becoming a 'positional good' that loses

value with increasing uptake among young people, while at the same time imposing greater penalties for those who do not obtain it (Saunders, 1996).

Furthermore, I have found evidence to suggest that different educational outcomes are needed for young people in different SEPs in order to obtain comparable levels of security in the labour market. For the higher SEPs, most forms of participation put them above the security levels of all other SEPs, but underperformance (such as not achieving at least an upper-second degree) is more comparable to not obtaining a university degree at all within the same cluster. For the middle SEP, insecurity is decreased by attending a Russell Group university, or achieving at least an upper second degree, but also the subject of degree makes a difference. For instance, those graduating from the arts and humanities experience higher levels of insecurity than those who did not pursue a degree at all. For the lower SEPs, participating in higher education has the greatest returns in terms of the magnitude of the decrease in several measures of insecurity, however, despite this they still struggle to keep up to their more advantaged counterparts. Equally, while graduating from a Russell Group university reduced insecurity for all groups, the magnitude of this reduction diminishes going from the highest to the lowest SEP.

In addition, non-participation tends to be punished more than in other groups, particularly for young women, whereby those who do not obtain a degree are less likely to be in employment, and are more likely to be in part-time jobs, and to face underemployment at age 25. Apprenticeships on the other hand

have the best outcomes for these groups compared to middle and higher SEPs, particularly in lowering the probability of doing shift work and facing underemployment. Therefore, the bottom line is that while there are some differing 'right' choices people in different SEPs can make in order to reduce their experiences of insecurity in the labour market, their membership within a particular SEP itself still has more impact than educational interventions. My findings thus suggest that there is no universal solution to job insecurity in the form of educational qualifications and attainment that would work for many young people in lowering their chances of entering the labour market through insecure jobs, or in reducing these insecurities later in their participation within the labour market. Furthermore, the fact that the findings of my analysis suggest that a differential engagement in education is indeed required by young people in different SEPs exposes the on-going structural inequalities in returns from education.

The current policies in Europe emphasising developing the 'right' skills through the 'right' education or training in order to succeed and reduce inequality in the labour market (OECD, 2007; Russell et al, 2010; Braconier, 2012; European Commission, 2016) ignore the structural barriers to both education and employment (Evans, 2007; Furlong, 2009). I have shown that the strongest predictors of insecure employment among early leavers from education remain sex and caring responsibilities. In addition, for those who remain in education beyond the compulsory age, education is no longer a safe way to protect oneself from insecurity in the labour market, as it does not provide a universal solution to young people in all socio-economic positions.

I found no evidence to support the notion of education as an apparatus of the perpetuation of socio-economic inequalities working in favour of the dominant SEPs (Furlong, 2009), but the results did show that, for the lowest SEPs, even when engaging in certain forms of further education, they could not catch up to their high-SEP counterparts in terms of ensuring lower levels of insecurity within the labour market. This is confirmed by the historical comparison based on sex in Chapter 2, which revealed that individuals cannot be blamed for socially embedded inequalities that still exist in the Western societies. The trend is consistent with my analysis of early leavers in Chapter 3, which shows that the strongest predictors of obtaining secure employment at age 25/26, when early leavers from education should have had a reasonable amount of time to have established a secure position in the labour market, are the young person's sex and their parental responsibilities. These findings can hardly justify the government blaming individuals for their inability to obtain employment due to personal 'lacks' and the strategy of shifting all responsibility for one's position within the labour market to the individual without addressing the underlying barriers first.

In addition, while more women than men among the young entrants now hold higher and first degrees, at best the gender gap has shrunk by everyone's levels of insecurity increasing. Despite this, women are still more likely to be working part time and to have less access to job training. The amount of demand might have increased for women's formal labour, however, such demand remains inadequate and gender-biased by still providing mainly insecure, part-time, non-permanent jobs with smaller chances of job training

and thus less chance of progression for women. The remedy, particularly for women in lower SEPs, is graduating from STEM subjects, however, they are less likely than men to enrol in these in the first place.

Based on my findings, it is at least fair to question the suitability of the primary aim of government strategies to force young people into any kind of employment without taking responsibility for the consequences on their later stages of labour market participation. This is because entering insecure jobs, even at a younger age, has a scarring effect on later labour market security, particularly if young people get trapped in these positions for a longer period of time and later in their transitions. I do acknowledge that while it might be disadvantageous to experience periods of time not in education, training, or employment, for instance in terms of tackling social exclusion and anti-social or criminal behaviours, and addressing the needs of the knowledge economy, the effects of such experiences are not as harmful on later employment insecurity as is the experience of an insecure job itself. My findings are thus in line with much of the theoretical academic literature, as well as qualitative studies of precarity in the labour market, which posit that early experiences of insecurity are unlikely to be stepping-stones into more secure careers, but rather they are a labour market position in themselves. The implications thus call current government policy initiatives into question with regard to their effectiveness in tackling youth unemployment and insecurity through qualification inflation.

While the limitations of each of the three analyses were discussed in the relevant chapters, this section provides a summary of the limitations of my thesis as a whole, together with suggestions for future research. Firstly, much of the current literature on youth transitions avoids rigorous investigations into and quantification of the experiences of insecurity in the labour market – often simply due to a lack of comprehensive data. This, however, is not an excuse for failing to provide empirical evidence around the claims of changing insecurity in the youth labour market over the last few decades. On the contrary, existing data needs to be utilised in the most effective way possible, while acknowledging its shortcomings, with the aim of improving its quality and availability in future studies. My analyses addressed several types of insecurity through various measures or proxies of insecurity. While the measures covered a wide range of experiences of insecurity, my analyses are by no means a comprehensive account. With any potential improvement in the availability of data and accuracy of measures of insecurity, similar analysis should be repeated and further developed.

Secondly, all three of my analyses are focused on a restricted group of young people. While this was the most appropriate choice for the purpose of this thesis, it has restrictions in terms of its generalisability to wider populations. For instance, young people entering the labour market closer and further away in time from the 2008 financial crisis might have different experiences of insecurity and education, and being in NEET might have different impacts on them in the early stages of their transitions from education into and within the labour market. Additionally, I have only considered young people living in

England, who entered the English labour market. While similar trends in the changes within the youth labour market have been observed across Europe, analysis based on data collected in other countries would be needed to be able to confirm the findings outside of England. Furthermore, in my analyses I did not consider young people employed in the armed forces and those who were self-employed. These positions carry different risks and levels of insecurity than other types of employment, so should be addressed in further research.

Thirdly, I aimed to make my models as robust but also as parsimonious as possible, given the available data and suitable modelling techniques. However, I have to acknowledge the limitations of my statistical models in analysing social concepts such as insecurity in the labour market, particularly with regards to un-measured and un-measurable variables. It was not feasible within this thesis for me to design and execute primary data collection and therefore I had to rely on existing survey data, which limited the availability of more niche subsamples and variables. Furthermore, as with most longitudinal surveys, the Next Steps study suffers from attrition over time, whereby participants drop out over the course of the study. This is particularly important for my second analysis, wherein I analysed youth trajectories wave-on-wave and attrition may thus have introduced bias in the later waves of the analysis. A redeeming feature of the Next Steps dataset is that the sampling at a follow-up interview at age 25/26 was done from the original sample of the study rather than from those who responded in the latest wave (wave 7). This approach was able to mitigate some effects of attrition whereby even those

young people who dropped out over time might have gotten the opportunity to participate in the follow-up. Nevertheless, these shortcomings could have introduced bias into my analysis and resulted in erroneous conclusions, particularly with respect to more granular observations. However, I tended to take a more conservative approach in my analyses and therefore was more likely to encounter a false negative (type II error: failing to detect a relationship), rather than a false positive (type I error: detecting a relationship when in reality there is none).

Many of the limitations of this thesis could be addressed by future research. In terms of the data quality and availability, future surveys collecting data on youth transitions from education into and within the labour market could address the need for a measurable concept of insecurity. New questions addressing the multi-faceted nature of insecurity could be introduced and young people followed for longer into their entry and participation within the labour market. While there are existing nationally representative studies that have been running for longer than eight waves of data collection, such as the British Household Panel Survey, the sample sizes of young people entering the labour market at any specific point in time tend to be insufficient for a more nuanced analysis. Even the Next Steps dataset does not provide adequate sample sizes among the more niche subgroups of young people to offer the level of detail needed in order to fully address the effectiveness of contemporary government strategies in tackling youth unemployment and insecurity in the youth labour market.

It would thus be of interest in further research to be able to unpick the relationship between education and labour market outcomes in greater granurality, for instance, in terms of specific degree subject, qualification provider, training type, and apprenticeship placement. As inequality and social mobility were found to have more impact on youth transitions into the labour market than experiences of NEET, further investigation into the effects on security of other relevant government policies and interventions, in addition to those relating to increased participation in education, training, or employment specifcially investigated in this thesis, would be of interest. Lastly, one of the most interesting findings in the third analysis (Chapter 4) was the differential returns from various forms of education for young people in different socio-economic positions with regards to their experiences of insecurity. While I have discussed several qualitative studies that tried to unpick the relationship between educational schemes, such as internships and apprenticeships, and labour market outcomes, the ability to conduct this research at scale, on a nationally representative sample of young people, would be a very valuable addition to my research.

Nevertheless, my thesis does provide missing nationally representative empirical evidence on the extent of and inequality in the experiences of insecurity in the contemporary English youth labour market. I first established a more nuanced picture of the changes to insecurity in the labour market between now and thirty years ago, using data from the 1985 and 2015 Labour Force Survey. Then, using the longitudinal data from the Next Steps dataset, I uncovered the mechanisms through which young people find themselves in

insecure forms of employment for two groups: early-leavers from education, including those experiencing spells in NEET, and further-education graduates. My findings show that previous experiences of insecurity, as well as underlying structural factors such as one's socio-economic position, sex, and caring responsibilities, have much greater influence over young people's job insecurity later in their labour market transitions than non-participation in education, employment, or training. Accordingly, government policies that push young people into employment without considering its security may in fact be counter-productive in the aims of improving the transitions into work and outcomes for young people. Furthermore, government strategies that do not address underlying structural inequality, such as many contemporary policies that shift responsibility onto young people and away from the state, and increasingly conditional welfare support, are called starkly into question. A major policy implication of these findings is that pushing young people into employment without considering its security, both in terms of career progression and stability, might potentially make youth transitions more chaotic and less advantageous, and ultimately be a net drain on the individuals, the government, and society as a whole.

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Appendix A: Distributions of variables used in Chapter 4 analysis

Women

Variable	*Categories*	*Frequency*
Ethnicity	White	2857
	Mixed	202
	Asian	803
	Black	286
	[Missing]	133
NS-SEC	Not applicable/ Not in employment	1780
Wave 4	Routine occupations	448
	Semi-routine occupations	1138
	Lower supervisory and technical occupations/ Small employers and own account workers	109
	Intermediate occupations	133
	Lower managerial and professional occupations/ Higher Managerial and professional occupations	31
	[Missing]	642
NS-SEC	Not applicable	1074
Wave 5	Never worked/long term unemployed	243
	Routine occupations	448
	Semi-routine occupations	1113
	Lower supervisory and technical occupations/ Small employers and own account workers	204
	Intermediate occupations	214
	Lower managerial and professional occupations/ Higher Managerial and professional occupations	80
	[Missing]	905
NS-SEC	Not applicable (FT student)	1895
Wave 6	Never worked/long term unemployed	259
	Routine occupations	162
	Semi-routine occupations	394

	Lower supervisory and technical occupations/ Small employers and own account workers	128
	Intermediate occupations	249
	Lower managerial and professional occupations/ Higher Managerial and professional occupations	95
	[Missing]	1099
NS-SEC	Not applicable (FT student)	1770
Wave 7	Never worked/long term unemployed	343
	Routine occupations	113
	Semi-routine occupations	357
	Lower supervisory and technical occupations	126
	Small employers and own account workers/ Intermediate occupations	232
	Lower managerial and professional occupations/ Higher Managerial and professional occupations	136
	[Missing]	1204
Family	Never worked/long term unemployed	245
NS-SEC	Routine occupations	442
Wave 1	Semi-routine occupations	423
	Lower supervisory and technical occupations	408
	Small employers and own account workers	468
	Intermediate occupations	270
	Lower managerial and professional occupations	953
	Higher Managerial and professional occupations	517
	[Missing]	555
Family	Never worked/long term unemployed	244
NS-SEC	Routine occupations	440
Wave 2	Semi-routine occupations	376
	Lower supervisory and technical occupations	404
	Small employers and own account workers	298
	Intermediate occupations	269
	Lower managerial and professional occupations	942
	Higher Managerial and professional occupations	469
	[Missing]	839

Family	Never worked/long term unemployed	634
NS-SEC	Routine occupations	350
Wave 3	Semi-routine occupations	324
	Lower supervisory and technical occupations	388
	Small employers and own account workers	211
	Intermediate occupations	235
	Lower managerial and professional occupations	981
	Higher Managerial and professional occupations	442
	[Missing]	716
Family	Never worked/long term unemployed	704
NS-SEC	Routine occupations	243
Wave 4	Semi-routine occupations	405
	Lower supervisory and technical occupations	246
	Small employers and own account workers	315
	Intermediate occupations	294
	Lower managerial and professional occupations	901
	Higher Managerial and professional occupations	302
	[Missing]	871
Household	Up to £49 pw	5
Income	£50 to £99 pw	71
Wave 3	£100 to £199 pw	288
	£200 to £299 pw	422
	£300 to £399 pw	348
	£400 to £499 pw	316
	£500 to £599 pw	318
	£600 to £699 pw	253
	£700 to £799 pw	206
	£800 to £899 pw	185
	£900 to £999 pw	189
	£1,000 or more pw	515
	[Missing]	1165

Household	Up to £49 pw	33
Income	£50 to £99 pw	93
Wave 4	£100 to £199 pw	261
	£200 to £299 pw	363
	£300 to £399 pw	317
	£400 to £499 pw	304
	£500 to £599 pw	266
	£600 to £699 pw	223
	£700 to £799 pw	210
	£800 to £899 pw	186
	£900 to £999 pw	165
	£1,000 or more pw	553
	[Missing]	1307
Highest	No qualification	554
Family	Other qualifications/ Qualifications at level 1 and below	244
Qualification	GCSE grades A-C or equivalent	855
Wave 4	GCE A Level or equivalent	621
	Higher education below degree level	618
	Degree or equivalent	678
	[Missing]	711
Main	Not applicable/ Full-time education/ On a government scheme for employment training	3628
Activity	Full-time paid employee (30 or more hours a week)/ Part-time paid employee (under 30 hours a week)/ Part-time self-employed	26
Wave 3	Unemployed and seeking work	35
	Looking after home and/or family/ Waiting to go back to full time education/ Other answers	33
	[Missing]	559
Main	Going to a school or college full time	3064
Activity	In full-time paid work (30 or more hours a week)	153
Wave 4	Spending part of the week at a college, part of it with an employer/ On a training course or Apprenticeship	153
	Something else	271

	[Missing]	640
Main	Unemployed/Looking for Work	140
Activity	Full-time Education	2241
Wave 5	Working	782
	Part Working and Part College/ Apprenticeship/ Training	159
	At home/ Looking after the family/ Other	103
	[Missing]	856
Main	Unemployed and looking for work/ Waiting for exam results or result of job application	193
Activity	Doing a course at a university/ In education	1895
Wave 6	In paid work	942
	On a training course or scheme/ Doing an Apprenticeship/ Spending part of the week with an employer and part of the week at college/ Doing voluntary work	174
	Waiting for a course or job to start/ Looking after the family and home	170
	[Missing]	907
Main	Unemployed and looking for work	149
Activity	University/ School/ College education	1770
Wave 7	Paid work	972
	Training course/scheme/ Apprenticeship/ Part time job and part time college/ Voluntary work/ Government employment programme	77
	Waiting for a course or job to start/ Looking after home/family/ Travelling/ Break from work/college/ Ill or disabled/ Not defined	210
	[Missing]	1103
Whether has	No	1538
paid job	Yes	1856
Wave 6	[Missing]	887
Whether has	No	2383
paid job	Yes	789
Wave 7	[Missing]	1109
Whether has	No	3433
term-time job	Yes	720
Wave 1	[Missing]	128
Whether has	No	2901

term-time job	Yes	957
Wave 2	[Missing]	423
Whether has	No	2643
term-time job	Yes	1072
Wave 3	[Missing]	566
Highest NVQ	Other academic qualification	293
or equivalent	NVQ Level 1	348
	NVQ Level 2	876
	NVQ Level 3	865
	NVQ Level 4	1166
	NVQ Level 5	681
	[Missing]	52
Whether has	No degree/ Not applicable	2724
first degree	First or higher degree	1505
or higher	[Missing]	52
Degree area	No degree	3222
	Biological sciences and medicine	248
	Physical sciences and technology	86
	Social sciences	428
	Arts and Humanities	236
	[Missing]	61
Russell-group	No degree	2724
university	Degree from a non-Russell-group university	1270
degree	Degree from a Russell-group university	235
	[Missing]	52
Degree class	No degree	2724
	Third class honours/ Ordinary degree/ Pass/ Other/ Vague/irrelevant answer	89
	Lower second class honours (2.2)	228
	Upper second class honours (2.1)/ Merit	520
	First class honours/ Distinction	167
	[Missing]	553

Whether did	No	2978
apprenticeship	Yes	189
	[Missing]	1114
In employment	No	676
	Yes	3312
	[Missing]	293
Employed	No	741
full time	Yes	2749
	[Missing]	791
Whether does	No	2427
shift work	Yes	935
	[Missing]	919
Whether on	No	3149
a zero-hour	Yes	171
contract	[Missing]	961
Permanent	No	355
job	Yes	2842
	[Missing]	1084
Underemployed	No	1813
	Yes	2078
	[Missing]	390
Whether has	No	3210
child(ren)	Yes	1071
	[Missing]	0

Men

Variable	*Categories*	*Frequency*
Ethnicity	White	2341
	Mixed	151
	Asian	641
	Black	184
	[Missing]	109
NS-SEC	Not applicable/ Not in employment	1656
Wave 4	Routine occupations	318
	Semi-routine occupations	671
	Lower supervisory and technical occupations/ Small employers and own account workers	175
	Intermediate occupations	58
	Lower managerial and professional occupations/ Higher Managerial and professional occupations	50
	[Missing]	498
NS-SEC	Not applicable	970
Wave 5	Never worked/long term unemployed	266
	Routine occupations	312
	Semi-routine occupations	662
	Lower supervisory and technical occupations/ Small employers and own account workers	289
	Intermediate occupations	77
	Lower managerial and professional occupations/ Higher Managerial and professional occupations	106
	[Missing]	744
NS-SEC	Not applicable (FT student)	1461
Wave 6	Never worked/long term unemployed	197
	Routine occupations	166
	Semi-routine occupations	262
	Lower supervisory and technical occupations/ Small employers and own account workers	236
	Intermediate occupations	81
	Lower managerial and professional occupations/ Higher Managerial and professional occupations	112

	[Missing]	911
NS-SEC	Not applicable (FT student)	1353
Wave 7	Never worked/long term unemployed	261
	Routine occupations	118
	Semi-routine occupations	236
	Lower supervisory and technical occupations	151
	Small employers and own account workers/ Intermediate occupations	126
	Lower managerial and professional occupations/ Higher Managerial and professional occupations	109
	[Missing]	1072
Family	Never worked/long term unemployed	162
NS-SEC	Routine occupations	327
Wave 1	Semi-routine occupations	385
	Lower supervisory and technical occupations	335
	Small employers and own account workers	400
	Intermediate occupations	229
	Lower managerial and professional occupations	745
	Higher Managerial and professional occupations	448
	[Missing]	395
Family	Never worked/long term unemployed	134
NS-SEC	Routine occupations	304
Wave 2	Semi-routine occupations	348
	Lower supervisory and technical occupations	345
	Small employers and own account workers	270
	Intermediate occupations	196
	Lower managerial and professional occupations	782
	Higher Managerial and professional occupations	397
	[Missing]	650
Family	Never worked/long term unemployed	462
NS-SEC	Routine occupations	271
Wave 3	Semi-routine occupations	276
	Lower supervisory and technical occupations	314

	Small employers and own account workers	202
	Intermediate occupations	174
	Lower managerial and professional occupations	750
	Higher Managerial and professional occupations	409
	[Missing]	568
Family	Never worked/long term unemployed	551
NS-SEC	Routine occupations	189
Wave 4	Semi-routine occupations	326
	Lower supervisory and technical occupations	206
	Small employers and own account workers	303
	Intermediate occupations	231
	Lower managerial and professional occupations	715
	Higher Managerial and professional occupations	275
	[Missing]	630
Household	Up to £49 pw	13
Income	£50 to £99 pw	65
Wave 3	£100 to £199 pw	214
	£200 to £299 pw	286
	£300 to £399 pw	266
	£400 to £499 pw	257
	£500 to £599 pw	273
	£600 to £699 pw	228
	£700 to £799 pw	174
	£800 to £899 pw	138
	£900 to £999 pw	153
	£1,000 or more pw	455
	[Missing]	904
Household	Up to £49 pw	20
Income	£50 to £99 pw	67
Wave 4	£100 to £199 pw	225
	£200 to £299 pw	280

	£300 to £399 pw	249
	£400 to £499 pw	220
	£500 to £599 pw	249
	£600 to £699 pw	198
	£700 to £799 pw	174
	£800 to £899 pw	153
	£900 to £999 pw	159
	£1,000 or more pw	484
	[Missing]	948
Highest	No qualification	428
Family	Other qualifications/ Qualifications at level 1 and below	216
Qualification	GCSE grades A-C or equivalent	674
Wave 4	GCE A Level or equivalent	485
	Higher education below degree level	479
	Degree or equivalent	642
	[Missing]	502
Main	Not applicable/ Full-time education/ On a government scheme for employment training	2903
Activity	Full-time paid employee (30 or more hours a week)/ Part-time paid employee (under 30 hours a week)/ Part-time self-employed	21
Wave 3	Unemployed and seeking work	28
	Looking after home and/or family/ Waiting to go back to full time education/ Other answers	32
	[Missing]	442
Main	Going to a school or college full time	2325
Activity	In full-time paid work (30 or more hours a week)	174
Wave 4	Spending part of the week at a college, part of it with an employer/ On a training course or Apprenticeship	210
	Something else	221
	[Missing]	496
Main	Unemployed/Looking for Work	167
Activity	Full-time Education	1646
Wave 5	Working	610

	Part Working and Part College/ Apprenticeship/ Training	226
	At home/ Looking after the family/ Other	99
	[Missing]	678
Main	Unemployed and looking for work/ Waiting for exam results or result of job application	194
Activity	Doing a course at a university/ In education	1461
Wave 6	In paid work	703
	On a training course or scheme/ Doing an Apprenticeship/ Spending part of the week with an employer and part of the week at college/ Doing voluntary work	207
	Waiting for a course or job to start/ Looking after the family and home	102
	[Missing]	759
Main	Unemployed and looking for work	170
Activity	University/ School/ College education	1353
Wave 7	Paid work	745
	Training course/scheme/ Apprenticeship/ Part time job and part time college/ Voluntary work/ Government employment programme	138
	Waiting for a course or job to start/ Looking after home/family/ Travelling/ Break from work/college/ Ill or disabled/ Not defined	104
	[Missing]	916
Whether has	No	1320
paid job	Yes	1364
Wave 6	[Missing]	742
Whether has	No	963
paid job	Yes	493
Wave 7	[Missing]	1970
Whether has	No	2531
term-time job	Yes	789
Wave 1	[Missing]	106
Whether has	No	2221
term-time job	Yes	859
Wave 2	[Missing]	346
Whether has	No	2193
term-time job	Yes	790

Wave 3	[Missing]	443
Highest NVQ or equivalent	Other academic qualification	253
	NVQ Level 1	384
	NVQ Level 2	793
	NVQ Level 3	622
	NVQ Level 4	794
	NVQ Level 5	544
	[Missing]	36
Whether has first degree or higher	No degree/ Not applicable	2251
	First or higher degree	1139
	[Missing]	36
Degree area	No degree/ Not applicable	2644
	Biological sciences and medicine	129
	Physical sciences and technology	215
	Social sciences	248
	Arts and Humanities	148
	[Missing]	42
Russell-group university degree	No degree	2251
	Degree from a non-Russell-group university	943
	Degree from a Russell-group university	196
	[Missing]	36
Degree class	No degree	2251
	Third class honours/ Ordinary degree/ Pass/ Other/ Vague/irrelevant answer	60
	Lower second class honours (2.2)	188
	Upper second class honours (2.1)/ Merit	348
	First class honours/ Distinction	138
	[Missing]	441
Whether did apprenticeship	No	2248
	Yes	259
	[Missing]	919
In employment	No	348

	Yes	2873
	[Missing]	205
Employed full time	No	315
	Yes	2656
	[Missing]	455
Whether does shift work	No	2153
	Yes	757
	[Missing]	516
Whether is on a zero-hour contract	No	2678
	Yes	193
	[Missing]	555
Permanent job	No	253
	Yes	2324
	[Missing]	849
Underemployed	No	1303
	Yes	1875
	[Missing]	248
Whether has child(ren)	No	2957
	Yes	469
	[Missing]	0